Marxism Today

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Editorial Comments

Jon Bloomfield — Students, Politics and the Crisis

Eric Hobsbawm — The Crisis of Capitalism in Historical Perspective

Monty Johnstone — Trotsky and the Popular Front Part 1

Document:

Le Duan — Forward to the Future

NUS Demonstration backs Lancaster Students, 1975

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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 19, Number 10

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Editorial Comments

THE 107th Annual Trade Union Congress met at Blackpool against the background of the deepest and most severe crisis of British capitalism since the war. It was the attitude and response to this crisis that dominated the debates and decisions as represented by the Supplementary Report of the General Council and Composite resolution which set out the policy of wage restraint that is the basis of the Social Contract. In opposition to the General Council line on wage restraint were composite 9 and resolution 60. The latter opposing the use of the law in collective bargaining, secured over four million votes.

There is no doubt that despite a certain similarity between the two composites 8 and 9 on economic policies for dealing with unemployment and inflation, there exists deep apprehension about the claim that wage increases are the main cause of crisis or that holding wages down combined with further drastic cuts in expenditure on social services is a solution. Almost every speaker supporting the General Council, especially the seconder from NALGO, voiced the fears and reservations that exist widely in the movement about adopting policies that have failed in the past to deal with the crisis, and what is more, have, as Ken Gill pointed out, inevitably led to the defeat of a Labour Government.

Symptomatic of this mood and, incidentally, of the growth of left influence, is the fact that the General Council was compelled to argue that "no worker should receive less than £6 per week increase" and that the standstill should last for the "next twelve months only". This clearly conflicts with the Government aims of making the £6 a maximum that not all workers will get and for wage freezing to be part of an ongoing policy.

Although Congress supported Composite 8, a card vote being carried, the margin of support can bring little comfort to the Government or to the sponsors, for the three million and more votes show that there is, compared with September 1974, a stronger basis on which to command the fight in the coming period, a feature of which could well be the growing demand for the recall of Congress to examine its policy in the light of events.

Although defeated in the vote, the left and progressive forces won the argument, because they did pose the alternative and demonstrated, using the post-war experience of Labour Governments, that the future of the present Government rests on compelling it to carry through its election programme.

While this was the central issue there were many resolutions adopted which consolidate and advance the left and progressive trends, including composite 2 which demanded that occupations and work-ins be treated as accepted forms of industrial action and immune from legal proceedings.

Although the Working Women's Charter was not endorsed, preference being given to the existing TUC Women's Charter, Congress with General Council support, adopted the demand for free contraception and abortion on request. The strength of feeling and frustration over the continued imprisonment of Des Warren erupted into a demonstration and, with the exception of the EEPTU, now totally isolated in the TUC, the delegates made clear that they expected the power of the movement to be used to free the picket and bring about changes in the law.

A further increase in membership was reported, there now being 10,363,724 affiliated members from 111 unions and represented at Congress by 1,030 delegates.

In the elections for the General Council, further left and progressive gains were made; Bill Leys, John Martin, Reg. Birch, with the right-winger Ray Grantham defeated.

Significantly, the standing of the *Morning Star* in the movement was reflected in the highest ever cash contribution of £920 to which must be added £300 collected prior to Congress in SOGAT. Similarly the contribution in the debate of the 27 Communists who spoke, with Ken Gill emerging as the main spokesman of the left, were a powerful demonstration of the Communists' adherence to principle.

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JOHN MAHON'S BIOGRAPHY OF HARRY POLLITT

Those who worked with John Mahon in the Minority Movement, or during his long years as a leading member and then as Secretary of the London District Committee of the Communist Party, as member of the Party's Executive and Political Committee, those who listened to his lectures, heard his reports, studied his articles, benefited from his friendship or advice, all deeply mourned his death earlier this year.

Those of us who worked with him on the Editorial Board of *Marxism Today*, on which he long served as an active and creative member, will sadly miss his co-operation.

When he withdrew from the position of London District Secretary it was not to some tranquil retirement. He continued to work, harder than ever if that is possible, to fulfil a plan on which he had long reflected—to write the biography of Harry Pollitt.

When he died, in the midst of his work, he was completing the last footnotes to this book on which he had spent years of most meticulous research. When death caught him he was already planning the work (on the shop stewards movement) that was to follow.

He left us a precious legacy, his Pollitt biography, which will be published by Lawrence & Wishart early in 1976.[1]

Pollitt's life covered the whole period of the upsurge of the working class movement before the First World War, the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the development of the movement from the 1920s to the 1960s.

Pollitt's personality in all its compelling energy and warmth of human feeling comes through in John Mahon's pages. The opening chapters deal with his boyhood and youth in Manchester, his employment at the railway workshops, his activities in the Openshaw Socialist Society and the Boilermakers' Union. They give an engrossing picture of working class life before and at the commencement of the First World War, followed by a vivid account of the impact of the Russian Revolution on the British working class.

Much attention is paid to Pollitt's knowledge of and contribution to the trade union movement, his work, for instance, in the Minority Movement in the 1920s. Towards the end of his life Harry Pollitt was working on a book about trade union organisation and policy, from the notes for which John Mahon extensively quotes.

A moving part of the biography is devoted to the great anti-fascist struggles of the 30s —in particular the war in Spain, the formation and deeds of the British Battalion of the International Brigade, and Pollitt's frequent visits to Spain.

John Mahon explains Harry Pollitt's views at the opening of the Second World War and takes the history of Pollitt's life and role through the course of the war and the post-war years right up to his death.

This is a book which will have to be studied by all who wish to understand the struggles of the labour movement and the Communist Party from 1920 to 1960, and the background of the decade that went before.

CRITIQUE OF BACHELARD

Editions Sociales, publishing house of the French Communist Party, has recently published a critique by Michael Vadée of the work of the eminent French "historical-epistemologist" of the sciences, Gaston Bachelard.[2] Bachelard's work is largely unknown in this country, for little of his theoretical work has been translated, and also he bridges in an "uncomfortable" way the usual boundaries between the disciplines of the history and philosophy of the sciences.

In France, however, his works have been the object of lively debate in recent years, for much of the early work of Althusser was inspired by the approach to the sciences that Bachelard advocated in a series of books that stretch back to 1928. The idea of the "epistemological break" which Althusser introduced in *For Marx* to rework the orthodox distinction between the young and the mature Marx was inspired very largely by Bachelard, and much of Althusser's terminology was derived from a Bachelardian approach to the sciences.

Vadée argues in his book that Marxists ought to be wary of borrowing ideas from the work of a writer who, as indicated in his title, he believes to be the exponent of an "epistemological idealism", a philosophy which is foreign to Marxism. In a closely-argued series of chapters he outlines a number of criticisms of the work of Bachelard, drawing attention to the idealist basis

[1] John Mahon—*Harry Pollitt: a Biography*, Lawrence & Wishart, c. 600 pages, £6.00.

[2] Michel Vadée; *Gaston Bachelard ou le Nouvel Idealisme Epistemologique*; Editions Sociales, Paris 1975.

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of the "rationalist materialism" as Bachelard sometimes called his position. Along with this Vadée systematically criticises a Marxist exponent of Bachelard, Dominique Lecourt, whose work has in fact recently been translated in part under the title *Marxism and Epistemology* (published by New Left Books). Anyone who wishes to understand more thoroughly the nature of theoretical debates among Marxists in France can be recommended this book, and it is to be hoped that its arguments gain a wider hearing.

LAWRENCE & WISHART'S PUBLISHING PLANS

Lawrence & Wishart offer an impressive list of new books to be published in the remaining part of this year. Already on sale is a reprint of Wal Hannington's handbook for procedure at meetings—*Mr Chairman* (75p); and John Hoffman's *Marxism and the Theory of Praxis* (£4).

Then will follow *Student Politics and Higher Education* (£4.50 hardback, £2 paperback) by Digby Jacks; *Art and Revolution* (£4) by the famous Mexican mural-painter David Siqueiros; and a short and strikingly original essay on Marxism and psychology by the French philosopher Lucien Sève—*Marxism and the Theory of Human Personality* (£1.50).

After that will come a new book on *The French Resistance* (£5.50 hardback, £2 paperback) by Frida Knight who was in Paris when the Germans invaded and afterwards worked at De Gaulle's headquarters in London; John Lewis's *Max Weber and Value-free Sociology* (£5.50 hardback, £2 paperback); *Agriculture, Capitalist and Socialist* (£5) by Jack Dunman; and a new anthology of *Political Verse and Song from Great Britain and Ireland* (£1.50), edited by Mary Ashraf.

Next year will see the fiftieth anniversary of the General Strike. Lawrence & Wishart have already anticipated this with a reprint of Emile Burns' *The General Strike, Trades Councils in Action*, first published by the Labour Research Department in 1926. A large book on the General Strike, of over 400 pages, will be published early in 1976, edited by Jeffrey Skelley. It will contain historical studies of the economic and social conditions which led to the strike, the course of the strike itself, and the consequences of the strike, by John Foster, James Klugmann and Martin Jacques, together with a series of research studies of the events of the nine days in different regions of England, Scotland and Wales, and of personal reminiscences.

FORTHCOMING DOCUMENTS

Following the publication in our September issue of the *Draft Programme of Liberties* of the French Communist Party, we shall continue to print in forthcoming issues of *Marxism Today*, under the rubric of *Documents*, a series of resolutions, statements, reports etc., of different Communist Parties.

It is not our editorial intention that such publication should imply any attitude towards the documents selected, but that, in this way, we should keep our readers informed of the main currents of thought and approach in the international communist movement.

We hope to include, amongst others, over the next issues, a speech by Le Duan, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Workers Party, extracts from Tito's *Memories of the Partisan Resistance Struggles*, the text of a Lecture on Fascism by Palmiro Togliatti, delivered at the Lenin School, Moscow, in 1935, extracts from Enrico Berlinguer's Report to the 14th Congress of the Communist Party of Italy (dealing with the "Historical Compromise"), statements of the Portuguese and Spanish, Indian and Japanese Communist Parties, and of the Communist Party of the United States and of a number of socialist countries.

Suggestions are always welcome.

CONFERENCE ON PRE-CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

The History and Sociology Groups of the Communist Party have organised a joint conference to discuss recent theoretical advances in the Marxist study of Pre-Capitalist Societies.

It will be held over the week-end October 18-19 in the Conference Room of the University College of London Students Union, Central Collegiate Building, 15 Gordon Street, London WC1 commencing on Saturday October 18 at 10 a.m.

The main items for discussion at the Conference will be as follows:—

"Marxist Perspectives on Pre-Capitalist Societies" opened by Prof. Ron Frankenberg of Keele University.

"History and Anthropology" opened by Judith Ennew (Cambridge).

"Childe and European Pre-History" opened by Peter Gathercole of the Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology, Cambridge.

"Marxism and the 'New Archaeology'" opened by Michael Stephen, Southampton University.

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Students, Politics and the Crisis

Jon Bloomfield

(*The author is National Student Organiser of the Communist Party*)

The present acute distress of British capitalism is affecting all areas of economic and social life. The education system has not been immune from this process, with post-school education being sharply impacted. For the ruling class this situation poses a series of problems as regards the future course of post-school education.

An Analytical Framework

Those who effectively determine post-school education policy—the University Grants Committee (UGC) and its sub-committees; Vice-Chancellors; Polytechnic Directors; along with the administrators of the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the Education Ministers—have two major strategic responsibilities for the ruling class. Firstly, post-school education must ensure a steady flow of technically proficient, skilled labour for the economy. The scientific, technological and administrative developments within monopoly capitalism since the end of World War II have correspondingly increased the social importance of post-school education.

Secondly, because of its organic relation to ideology, post-school education has a specific function in attaching the intellectual strata of each new generation to the existing social order either by securing an ideological commitment to it or a passive acquiescence in it. Thus ruling class policy has a dual purpose; to produce the skilled labour power necessary to the development of the means of production; and to ensure by the hegemony of bourgeois ideology, the acceptance of capitalist social relations of production by students.

The fulfilment of these tasks is influenced both by general political considerations and those of a specifically educational character. The weak position of the economy and the decision by the Labour Government to reduce public expenditure as a part of its overall economic policy restricts the expansion of post-school education—a situation which the education policy makers broadly accept. At the same time their desire to weld post-school education more closely to the direct needs of monopoly is hampered by the historical evolution of higher education in this country with its special emphasis on universities. Thus the future supply of sufficient, trained labour geared to the economy is threatened, while the proportion of the 18-20 age group entering post-school education remains among the lowest in the advanced capitalist world. In the ideological field the wide-spread crisis which capitalism is facing affects the ability of universities and colleges to gain acceptance of existing society from students. This crisis also encompasses many areas of study, creating further ideological disarray.

We must be clear that the resolution of these questions is a matter of political struggle. The degree to which this ruling class strategy is resisted and an alternative approach pursued is dependent on the unity, actions and consciousness of students and teachers and the degree to which they can win the sympathy and active support of the working class movement for their struggles.

Ruling-Class Policy

1. National

The past 18 months have seen a number of national developments take place in accord with this strategy. As Labour Cabinet Ministers have announced a broad range of reductions in all social service expenditure and provision, so Education Ministers Reg Prentice, Lord Crowther-Hunt and Fred Mulley have announced wholesale cuts in every sector of education. In the sphere of post-school education projected student numbers for 1981 have been reduced by one-seventh to 640,000; the numbers engaged in teacher-training are being cut by 45 per cent to 60,000; a large-scale re-organistion and restriction of overseas students undertaken, major building projects have been cancelled, while in August the government halved the amount of money available to the universities for building for the next year. At the same time several colleges are being closed down and many merged in a complex process of restructuring post-school education.

The attempt to gear post-school education more directly to the requirements of monopoly demands a re-balancing of the relative weights of the university and polytechnic sectors in favour of the latter. The polytechnics, incorporating the colleges of education through mergers, are viewed as the technocratic institutions through which a trained, skilled labour force can be most swiftly and cheaply taught in

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accordance with the needs of the economy and state.[1]

With post-school education in a period of flux and change those eager to shape it in a reactionary direction have been vocal.

Sir Keith Joseph has written of his ". . . strong belief in the pursuit of truth, freedom of thought and expression and tolerance of the views of others. But it is an illusion to suppose that these liberal ideals can always be defended by liberal methods. When confronted with totalitarian fanatics (i.e. Marxists) . . . academics must either reject them or ultimately perish. . . ."[2] He had earlier spoken of the need to take action against "cuckoos in our democratic nest". These McCarthyite sentiments, aimed at enforcing a passive, ideologically quiescent teaching and student body, have been echoed by fellow Tory MP St John Stevas and others, most recently and forcefully by Terence Miller, the director of N London Polytechnic who said of student and academic opponents, "I sit in my office and itch for the ability to say 'hang the ringleaders!'"[3] Yet these views are not restricted to the avowedly reactionary. The journal of the academic establishment, the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, spoke in a recent editorial of how universities "are peculiarly susceptible to the activities of a fifth column". The editorial continued, ". . . those universities which are most troubled contain a small number of hooligans" and ". . . these people have no place in the universities.[4]

2. Local

At the local level within each educational institution the strategy has expressed itself in a variety of ways. Most obvious and widespread has been the drive for education "on the cheap" as university and college administrators have attempted to carry out the nationally-imposed cutbacks. Teaching posts have been left unfilled; library budgets and opening hours reduced; teaching and demonstrating work for post-graduates cut; courses removed, and building projects cancelled, while students have been charged with the full "economic" cost for the services they receive. This particular policy has had severe repercussions on the charges students face since many of them live in accommodation which was loan-financed. Hence what the authorities consider as the "economic" rent includes the amount they are paying back in interest rates to the banks.

Most university and college administrators have accepted this lowering of material standards and attempted to carry it out.

With their room for manoeuvreability and concession limited, they have readily sought the aid of the state to cower students' opposition to their measures. Court orders and legal injunctions have been employed while, in three major disputes in the past year and a half, university authorities have used the police to break student union action. At Essex in March 1974, police arrested 105 students picketing supplies to their university; at Lancaster a year later, over 100 police were called to end an occupation; and in May at Warwick University over 600 police were similarly employed. The hallowed slogans of "Academic Freedom" and "No Police on Campus" no longer echo from Vice-Chancellors' mouths. The cold winds of Britain's economic and social crisis have penetrated the ivory towers.

This lowering of material standards has been accompanied by a concentration of power in the hands of senior administrators. Universities and colleges have never been especially democratic institutions as far as their students were concerned, and, having largely deflected the 1968 call for "student power", the past few years in many places has seen an accretion of power within central administrative bodies, to the detriment of student interests and that of wide sections of teaching staff. Along with this has come the drive to give the education provided a clearer technocratic and vocational orientation with State and big business research grants lending a guiding hand. In this process antagonism has been shown to those opposed to the established orthodoxies. Those who argue from a Marxist or radical viewpoint and are sympathetic to their students have been attacked, as the Blackburn, Craig and Atkinson cases show. They illustrate that ideological conformity as well as cheaply trained labour figure prominently in ruling class strategy.

The Student Response

However, this attempt by the state to resolve the crisis as it affects post-school education in the interests of big business accelerates and intensifies the objective change in the social position of students. The potential for drawing the majority more decisively into opposition to state monopoly capitalism is enhanced. Our analysis of this fundamental shift has been made elsewhere.[5] Suffice to state here that our Party considers that the mass of students and their organisations can be won to a progressive position on their own demands, while many sections can be mobilised to support domestic

[1] For more on this see Martin Jacques, *Universities and Capitalism—The Present Crisis*, *Marxism Today*, July 1975.

[2] *Times Education Supplement* (THES) 15.11.1974.

[3] *The Guardian*—9.6.1975.

[4] THES, 2.3.1975.

[5] D. Cook, *Students*—Communist Party pamphlet (1973).

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working class struggles and those of national liberation and anti-imperialist movements abroad. Thus, within our strategy for socialist revolution in Britain students form an important component of the anti-monopoly alliance, with their own distinctive role to contribute.

1. Economic

During the past few years the student movement's political experience has validated many of the tenets of this thesis. As student living standards fell, the Left was able to provide the student body as a whole through the National Union of Students with a programme of campaigning and activity which showed the unity and determination of students in the fight for an adequate grant, and a non-discriminatory award system.[6] Hundreds of thousands have been involved in pickets and rallies, strikes and occupations, as well as massive, national demonstrations on the grants issue in the past four years. On a range of other economic and social questions, notably hall of residence rents, catering prices and facilities and inadequate housing provision, students throughout the country have engaged in rent strikes, catering boycotts and squats and other actions.

2. Democratic

Similarly, over a wide spectrum of democratic issues we have seen students in many institutions enter into dispute with their authorities. On the question of student representation, over the maintenance of secret files on students, in defence of the autonomy of student unions, over the right to maintain sabbatical union officers and in support of victimised union members, there have been a host of campaigns both in the defence and for the extension of students' democratic rights.

3. Ideological

In what can be broadly termed the ideological arena events have been more complex. 1968 saw a widespread anti-Establishment upsurge which drew inspiration from several quarters, but was effectively cohered by its commitment to the Vietnamese Liberation Movement. The impact of the anti-capitalist radicalism of this period on a generation of students cannot be under-estimated, yet its cohesion swiftly disintegrated as the illusions over students' "vanguard" role fractured.

Yet the past could not return. Student attachment to the existing social order has been unhinged. Under the impact of these student developments the swift political change throughout the world from the mid-1960s and the drawing to a close of the post-war capitalist boom, the general air of self-confidence and assurance which the universities had previously exuded began to wane. It was no longer apparent that we lived in the best of all possible worlds; the era of easy bourgeois optimism had passed.

Thus the ability of post-school education to guarantee the reproduction of the social relations of production was shaken. This situation was accentuated by the penetration of general capitalist instability into students' subjects of study.

Within social science subjects the disparity between the teaching and the reality showed most clearly. The textbook (capitalist) world without unemployment, without crisis and without class conflict, squared uneasily with political and economic developments, while a resurgence of interest in Marxism meant that the main alternative philosophy could no longer be ignored. Similar incongruities were apparent elsewhere. In education, plans for integrated studies and mixed ability teaching were barely applicable to those teaching in over-size classes in dilapidated schools, while the major problems of environment and pollution, along with the general question of the social direction of science could not remain forever forbidden territory for science and technology courses. Some student action on these questions has taken place.

Significant disputes have arisen, notably over the economics course at Cambridge and social sciences at York, while a major counter-course movement has been generated at Kent. There have been disputes at several other colleges on these questions while it is students, postgraduates and young academics who are the core of the Left and progressive journals, such as *Radical Philosophy*, *Conference of Socialist Economists* and *Radical Science Journal*, which have emerged in the recent period. These developments, along with the boom in the sales of Marxist literature, illustrate a rekindling of an interest in Marxism amongst students and intellectual strata. A further indication of this interest has come with the success of the annual Communist University of London. This 9-day Marxist event which the Communist Party has organised for seven years attracted over 700 people this summer and is rapidly establishing itself as a major arena for an assault on bourgeois ideas within specialist disciplines and the development of Marxist theory.

However, in comparison with the work of many of the student movements of Western Europe, our work has lagged in this field. As yet the ideas of Marxism interest only a small minority of students. A widespread student response to the world in general and their study in particular remains hollow

[6] At present a large number of students in the non-university sector receive their grants at the discretion of the local education authority. A major plank of the NUS campaigning on grants has been the demand that all students in post-school education should receive mandatory awards.

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scepticism. In a period of intellectual as well as economic crisis, the British empirical, anti-theoretical tradition increasingly relies on scepticism, and its political complement cynicism, as a major ideological weapon. It is not surprising that with these sentiments—they barely deserve the term ideology—pervasive within the academic sphere, wide sections of students should be influenced by them. Neither is it accidental that *Private Eye* is the favourite student Common Room/TV Lounge magazine. Clearly, there is a major task here for the Left. To grasp the initiative by suggesting genuinely critical and controversial courses, and by developing rational and scientific thought against the upholders of mysticism and apologia would offer an intellectual and ideological beacon to many students—and teachers—at present stranded on the barren quicksands of cynicism and scepticism.

4. Women

The ideological grip of bourgeois ideas in post-school education has been further weakened by the increased influence of the Women's Liberation Movement amongst students. A powerful challenge is developing to established ideas about women's subordinate role in society and to the material discrimination in which these ideas are rooted. The student movement has been engaged in campaigning over the issues of nurseries, contraception and abortion. In many colleges courses of women's studies have been established while discussion on the question of sexism is widespread.[7]

Students and the Working-class Movement

As a Party we have argued that the future character and political role of the student movement will be conditioned by the relationship it is able to establish to the organised working class movement. We have firmly opposed both those who have argued that students have a "vanguard" role to play in the battle for Left and socialist advance and those "workerist" trends that consider that students should subordinate and subjugate themselves and their organisations to the working class. We have rejected both these tendencies, since neither expresses the dialectical relationship that must exist between an autonomous student movement and the labour movement, if students are to make their maximum contribution to a strengthening anti-monopoly alliance. Such a relationship hinges on the solidarity which each section expresses for the other's struggles and the organic links which are welded between the two movements, as well as a recognition of the specific role of each.

The past few years have recorded major advances here. Student support to vital working class struggles, notably the UCS work-in and the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974 has been extensive, while several NUS campaigns have received widespread official union support. In their localities many student unions have welded close links with the labour movement—observer status on Trades Councils has become common—and NUS has been able to develop contacts and co-operation at a national level.

This trend towards student-labour movement co-operation closely parallels the growing relationship between teachers' organisations and the trade union movement. The evolution of post-school education which has altered the social position of students has also transformed that of the academic staff. This process has developed unevenly with the ATTI taking a lead on the wages front and in the fight for progressive education policy, but recent stirrings in the AUT, notably its Day of Action on May 6, indicate that similar developments are afoot there. The forthcoming ballot of AUT members on whether to affiliate to the TUC will indicate how rapidly this process is moving. Undoubtedly these changes are being given further impetus by the present ruling class strategy for post-school education and create new possibilities for joint campaigning against these policies by students and teachers. It is equally vital to involve non-academic staff in such activity. The past period has seen the unionisation of many technical and clerical workers (mainly into ASTMS) and ancillary and catering employees (mainly into NUPE). These staff are threatened by the cutbacks in various ways: redundancy, increased work-load, maintenance of low wages and unsatisfactory conditions; and to wage effective campaigns against this strategy it is essential to draw upon the clear unity of interest that exists between students, teachers and non-academic staff.

Campaigning

The approach of the Broad Left on the major campaigning issues of the student movement has always been based on the twin premises of seeking the mass involvement of students and securing trade union support. It is around these perspectives that the Broad Left has argued and won student unions and NUS conferences to policies on grants, housing and education cuts encapsulating this outlook. With the sharpening attack on post-school education this approach needs further strengthening.

The key to this lies in providing the political and organisational framework within which the unity of students, teachers and non-academic staff can most effectively be expressed. This matter needs to be considered at three levels; campus; city or

[7] For a proper analysis on this question see S. Slipman in a forthcoming article in *Marxism Today*.

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county; and national. Only if developments occur at all three levels can an effective strategy be mounted.

An essential step is the formation of a joint-union committee within every educational institution on which every trade union as well as the student union has representatives. With regular meetings and discussions such committees can suggest common approaches that can be followed by their respective union members and can suggest joint forms of action. A joint-union committee, along with joint-union meetings, can provide the focus for united action at campus level. In addition, mutual suspicions are lessened by joint work and a greater degree of understanding of the specific problems each section faces is achieved.

This is exceptionally important since one of the main tactics of university and college authorities is to try to play off teachers or ancillary staff against students. Only the closest co-operation and understanding can ensure that a common approach is pursued and not one which places sectional interests above it. A recent, excellent example of this occurred at Gloucester College of Art and Design in the spring. During the course of a prolonged catering dispute with the college and county education authorities, the students were offered their demands provided six of the catering staff were declared redundant. Because of the close relations the students union had built up with NUPE and the clear understanding of their joint interest, the union leadership was able to argue and win a union meeting's agreement to reject the authorities' offer. Elsewhere, inter-union relations have often not been so harmonious with deleterious effects on the course of disputes, which lends added weight to the priority this area of work must be given.

With the breadth and scope of the cutbacks in the education service, it is necessary that a focus for activity exists at the city (or county) level. Here the Trades Councils have a major role to play. Not only are they the bodies with which most of the unions involved in education are connected but also they represent the core of the organised trade union movement, which has consistently made the question of adequate educational provision one of its major concerns. Thus, the Trade Councils represent the most effective instrument within a city or county for the emergence of a concerted campaign on education through the sponsorship of area conferences and the establishment of education sub-committees, Trade Councils could cohere campaigns within their localities and initiate actions in opposition to education cuts, aimed especially at metropolitan and county councils.

Activities of this character would provide a crucial link between local and national actions, as well as drawing the labour movement into the campaigns on education in an organised fashion. This process would be facilitated if the national leaderships of all the major unions involved were able to offer a national programme of action. A national delegate conference, followed by lobbies, mass demonstrations and stoppages of work would rouse the latent concern of many working people over the condition of our education service while giving a positive lead to those opposing the policy of retrenchment in their college or locality. If the Left is able to follow up the openings which have already been made and initiate a campaign of this character then the strategies of the DES and UGC will meet with a determined challenge.

Local Disputes

I have sketched here a general picture for the development of nation-wide campaigning on education. Within the sphere of post-school education, it is most likely that the sharpest conflicts will come in individual institutions where the authorities' policies encounter student resistance and the issue swiftly escalates to encapsulate a range of democratic questions. This has certainly been the experience of the major disputes of the past 18 months at Essex and Lancaster which both became national foci, whose outcome was anxiously awaited by Vice-Chancellors and students throughout the country.

At Essex, after an occupation in support of NUS grant demands over local and catering costs and accommodation facilities, a number of students were victimised. A Students' Union meeting on February 27 agreed to a Broad Left proposal to picket all supplies into the university. This picket proved so effective that the only way Vice-Chancellor Sloman could break it was to call in the police who arrested 105 students on March 18. A similar escalation unfolded in the dispute at Lancaster. An 800-strong rent strike was encountering intransigent opposition from the university. When a rent striker was refused a hardship loan, a union meeting decided to occupy the university administrative centre. A 100-strong police contingent assisted by university bailiffs were called up to end the 12-day occupation in which up to 1,100 students had participated. Feeling they had taken the offensive, the authorities then proceeded to instigate proceedings against 33 students, including the leading union officers. In both instances the authorities extended their attacks onto the autonomy of the student union and the rights of its officers and members to carry out union policy.

A clear understanding of the lessons of these struggles will aid the student movement to respond to the harsher political climate in which it now operates. With little room for manoeuvre, adventurist mistakes are less easy to retrieve while the use by the authorities of the courts and the police are a real likelihood that must be taken into account. To this

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situation there have been two common, spontaneous responses; on the one hand, empty militancy which urges re-occupation and confrontation with the forces of the state; and on the other, a feeling of powerlessness and despair which the Right eagerly exploits. Neither offers the student movement a way forward.

Crucial to an understanding of a dispute must be a clear analysis of the forces involved in the struggle, their relative strengths, the possibilities for winning additional forces to one's side, neutralising other elements and thereby isolating one's main opponent. I have analysed above the potential unity of forces that can be mobilised in student disputes. It is within the context of this strategic unity that the decision over which specific tactics to employ in any dispute must be taken. There is no automatic, militant tactic. Rather, tactics must be determined by their political effectiveness in achieving the maximum unity in action of those forces which we are aiming to win. Hence tactics which cut across or divide students from their potential—and necessary—allies are disruptive and result in student isolation and defeat.

The Essex Example

To give a concrete example, when students at Essex were victimised, there were calls for another occupation. The Broad Left opposed this arguing that this would re-inforce the opposition of campus trade unions and teaching staff to their case and increase student isolation. In turn, this would bring disunity to the student ranks and provide opportunities for the Right to mobilise support. The tactic appeared militant, but it led students on a disaster course. In contrast the Broad Left argued for an official student union picket of the university to prevent all supplies from entering the campus. This created the most favourable conditions for:

1. The maintenance of student unity by adopting a tactic which involved large numbers of students—it was a 24 hour day, 7 day a week picket—and against which it was hard for the Right to mobilise.
2. Undermining the hostility which campus unions had previously displayed to them.
3. Achieving the backing of the organised trade union movement both directly, from gaining agreement with lorry drivers not to cross union picket lines and generally from the local trade union movement and Trades Council, the latter having been made easier by past co-operation which had taken place.
4. The development of opposition to the Vice-Chancellor and senior administrators amongst the staff. The tactic gave progressive staff space to breathe and room to manoeuvre.

Thus, it is clear that the call for a mass picket corresponded to the strategic goal of cohering maximum teaching and trade union support behind the students' union and isolating the university authorities. It was the very success of the tactic in doing just this, along with its disruptive effect as the picketing cut the university's jugular vein, that forced the authorities to call in the police. Yet this in turn solidified student support, both at Essex and nationally[8] and increased the isolation of Sloman and his cohorts from the majority of teaching staff and campus workers. Thus, despite police intervention, the vocal backing of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the national Press, Sloman had to back down as the student picket continued. The expulsions of the Essex students were suspended and other charges dropped, while later in the year, those arrested received only minor fines in the courts.

By illustrating how to win teaching and trade union support, without demobilising student activity, the Essex dispute deserves to be a case study for the student movement. Above all, the deployment of specific tactics to achieve certain political tasks was clearly understood. The experience of Lancaster confirms the need for this to be constantly borne in mind.

Here the Broad Left policy of continued student action in the form of an academic strike, along with the firm national student support, was combined with a policy aimed at neutralising trade union opposition and weakening the basis of support among academic staff which the Vice-Chancellor relied on for hard line measures against the occupiers. This enabled the students' appeals against the heavy sentences demanded by the University authorities to take place in an atmosphere where it was possible for all sentences to be quashed without the authorities being in a position politically to re-instigate proceedings. Thus the forms of student action in any dispute will vary, but only if they are chosen in relation to the political criteria of unity and alliance, can the student movement counter the present ruling class offensive.

Students and Ideology

As in the realm of the economy so in the realm of ideology the bourgeoisie is in turmoil. As I discussed earlier the acceptance by students of the society they live in is no longer automatic, although a widespread response has been one of cynicism and apathy. To ensure that the ruling class is unable to re-establish its hegemony in the sphere of ideology the student Left must give more serious attention

[8] The NUS supported two demonstrations at Essex, one immediately after the arrests, the other at the start of the summer term.

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to this field of work. It is clear that the present situation offers opportunities both to challenge established orthodoxies and to secure a firmer Marxist intellectual current.

To respond to this situation a new approach by the student Left is required. Left and radical students have a responsibility to develop ideological work through the medium of faculty groups, academic societies, debates with intellectual protagonists, counter-courses, etc. and by campaigning over the question of course content.

The danger of academicism in this work is minimised if it is related to the need to engage in struggle to reform the existing courses.

Unlike other areas of student concern campaigning on these issues cannot readily acquire a student union wide, let alone national, character. Difference in subject leads to different demands being put forward on course and examination reform while no course is identical in any two institutions. Thus, it is hard to unite students in *different* faculties in the *same* institution around a set of demands: and similarly with students in the *same* faculty in *different* institutions. This is not to say it is impossible but the specific conditions for struggle in this field indicate the indispensability of a firm base of support and activists within the faculty.

Communist Party students intend to contribute to these developments as well as organising mini Communist Universities and weekend conferences of a specialist character. For the Left, it is important to create an atmosphere of controversy and debate within post-school education in place of the present lethargy and sterile anti-intellectualism. Such developments can only help the promotion of genuinely critical and Marxist thought, while bolstering the ideological understanding of many students.

Student Organisation

The unity of students within their representative organisations is vital for the conduct of these struggles. In the last decade student unions have undergone a radical transformation with their former restrictive constitutions and bureaucratic structures abolished. General meetings have become the policy-making bodies in most student unions with the union executive accountable to them.

Similar democratic changes have occurred in the structure of NUS conference and the election procedures to the NUS Executive. The prominent role of student unions and the NUS in many student struggles of recent years is inextricably linked to the transformation of these organisations into bodies amenable to the conduct of mass campaigns. Student unions locally, and the NUS Executive nationally have been able to give coherence and unity to students in their campaigns on economic, democratic and ideological issues. They have become the mass representative organs of the student movement.

Political Forces

1. The Right-Wing

Thus it is hardly any wonder that they have become the focus of attack by the right-wing. With its ideological demise in the later 1960s the right-wing was politically quiescent in student politics for several years. However, the class base for a student Right remained since the social origins, education, cultural formation and career aspirations of a minority of students tie them closely to the existing social system. Allied to this, a range of social democratic ideas exert considerable influence among students. Hence the re-emergence of the right-wing in the last two years is not surprising, especially given the present acute economic crisis.

As yet this right-wing has proved unable to unite its forces in a consistent manner. Its three main elements are the Federation of Conservative Students—the student wing of the Tory Party; its Liberal counterpart, the Union of Liberal Students; and the Radical Action Group[9] whose main figure Vallance-Owen has been accurately described as a "Lib/Lab social democrat"[10]. Up till now attempts to form even temporary alliances between these groups have failed, but future agreements cannot be ruled out, those between ULS and RAG being most probable.

The potential basis for agreement lies in the political concepts which are common to the three groups. Of central importance here is their concept of representative democracy which is essentially passive. Students should vote for their executive once a year. In between times they can vote on a major issue in a referendum but policy decisions should be taken by the executive. The notion of active student involvement and participation in union affairs throughout the year is completely absent. Hence the Right's call for the abolition of policy-making general meetings and for the return of representative councils and for referenda negate the entire concept of mass campaigning unions on which the student movement has based so much of its strength[11]. Their re-introduction would signal a return to the days when student unions were little

[9] Recently re-named the Representative Policy Movement.

[10] Article in THES, 7.3.1975.

[11] Their call for elections to the NUS Executive by national ballot would have a similar effect, while undermining the federal character of NUS and opening the elections to press and media interference.

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more than welfare organisations and social clubs where careerist student politicians practised their pseudo-parliamentary skills.

2. The Broad Left

The Broad Left—the strategic alliance of unaffiliated socialists, Labour lefts organised in Clause 4 and Communist Party students—clearly differs from its main opponents by its commitment to operative—as against passive—democracy and by its desire to draw the maximum number of students into campaigning activity. The Broad Left argues that through the struggles in which students participate, many will be won to a Left and socialist perspective. Thus, the Broad Left attempts to fulfil a dual role of providing leadership on the major issues facing students and promoting a socialist and anti-imperialist understanding among wide sections of the student body. The formation of local Broad Left societies in the past year, along with the regular production of the *Broad Left Journal* and the holding of bi-annual Broad Left conferences has established the Broad Left more firmly as a central force within the student movement. Its further strengthening is essential if the expected offensive from the Right is to be combated.[12]

3. Against Spontaneism

A strong Broad Left is also necessary to counter both spontaneist and leftist currents in the student movement. That these ideas exercise a certain sway in the student movement is undoubtedly related to the specific character of student life. One of the major characteristics of student life is the relative freedom which the individual student has, although this varies both between disciplines, generally, being greater in arts than in science, and between institutions, being greater in universities than elsewhere. This experience contrasts sharply with that of workers, whose rhythm of life is set by their factory or office hours. Isolated from the rhythm of social production, student life has its own distinctive character and pace, which is quite often very hectic. This rhythm affects the tempo of political life, which is also affected by the examination cycle and the long summer break. Arising from this, one of the characteristics—and sometimes one of the strengths—of student politics is its intensity. Yet it is precisely these conditions that breed spontaneism and excessive voluntarism, the belief that by an act of collective will students can conquer all opposition. The 1968 version based on the theory of universities as "Red bases" and students as the revolutionary vanguard crumbled quickly. The timing of the present re-emergence of populist trends relates to the anger students feel at their economic and educational situation and the attempt by ultra-left groups to capitalise on this current in an opportunist manner.

The International Socialists and International Marxist Group put forward tactics unconnected to an estimate of the balance of forces but on the basis of their own scale of militancy. Their fetishisation of particular tactics, notably rent strikes and sit-ins—the occupational disease of Leftism!—indicates a failure to link tactics to specific strategic objectives. This arises partly from their eagerness to create favourable conditions for recruitment to their ranks rather than concern for the success of the particular struggle.

Role of the Communist Party

Herein lies one of the sharpest differences between these groups and the Communist Party for one of the principles of our work is that our growth is complementary to the advance of the mass movement and can never be posed against it. As a party grounded in Marxism we base our political strategy on a rigorous, scientific analysis of the class and political forces operative in any situation. This is not to say we are automatically immune from leftism—or reformism. In our analyses we take account of the specific characteristics of student life and the spontaneity and volatility of much student politics—but we do not make ourselves prisoners to them.

This has enabled us to play a prominent part in the student struggle of the past few years. In the disputes at Essex, Warwick and Lancaster; in the major NUS campaigns; and in the development of Left Unity, Communist Party student branches and members have been to the forefront. Organised for struggle in the colleges and an integral part of a national organisation our branches are exceptionally well placed to undertake these tasks. In addition, as a Marxist party we understand the importance of bourgeois ideology in securing the allegiance of many social strata to the existing capitalist order. Our recognition of the significant role post-school education plays in the perpetuation of the hegemony of bourgeois ideology leads us to place a major emphasis of our work in the challenge to this hegemony.

From these brief points the indispensability of Communist Party branches for the conduct of effective student struggle is clear. A consolidation of our existing branches and the establishment of new ones is the surest guarantee that the progressive character of the student movement will be maintained and a new generation of students won to a socialist outlook.

[12] See D. Cook, *Marxism Today*, October 1974, for further analysis of Left Unity.

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The Crisis of Capitalism in Historical Perspective

Professor Eric Hobsbawm

(We print below the text of a lecture given by Professor Hobsbawm on March 5, 1975, under the auspices of the J. D. Bernal Peace Library.)

Everyone has known for a long time that the operations of the capitalist economy generate various types of periodic disturbance which gives it a sort of jerky rhythm. The best-known of these rhythms is the so-called trade-cycle, namely the slump, which was discovered by radical and socialist economists from the 1830s on, and analysed by the orthodox from 1860 on. Sometimes it has been more dramatic than at other times, sometimes—and notably in the years since the Second World War—it has been so mild that people have seriously doubted whether it was still in operation. Certainly it has been much less visible and important than ever before in capitalist history. However, though some of these slumps were catastrophic in their impact, both on business and on different classes of the people, with one exception none of them by themselves has looked like putting the capitalist system itself at risk on a world scale, nor possibly in any individual country. That exception is, of course, the slump of 1929 to 1933.

Periodical Fluctuations

Once the rhythm of the trade-cycle was recognised, slumps were, for the best part of a century, regarded as inevitable but temporary interruptions, analogous to the less predictable, but certainly periodic cycle of harvests which dominated the lives of pre-industrial societies. Capitalism lived with them, capitalism lived through them, capitalism survived them. However, perhaps it is less well known that there also appears to be a rather longer kind of periodical fluctuation in the course of capitalism, which the Russian economist, Koudratiev, tried to analyse in the 1920s, and which is still called by his name. Periods of 20 to 30 years or so—the exact length doesn't really matter—appear to alternate, marked until the present by the different movements of prices. Deflations succeeded inflations for fairly long periods. Then we may also detect a longer trend of this kind, a general tendency of prices to fall from the beginning of the 19th century, the end of the Napoleonic Wars, until almost the end, and a general trend of prices to rise, of which we are only too well aware—a long-term trend—since the beginning of the 20th century.

Periods of prosperity and capitalist expansion have thus alternated with periods of economic, and, as we shall see, with periods of political and social troubles. I think of this, of course, in terms of the assessment of business men. What happened to the common working people depended on other, admittedly connected, factors, so that some periods of business difficulties could see important improvements in the standards of living, and some periods of prosperity the opposite. But this is by the way. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to the end of the Napoleonic Wars was one such period of long-term trend. It was followed, until the middle or late 1840s, by a period of difficulties, though of rapid economic growth, and this in turn by the golden years of the mid-nineteenth century, the high point of capitalist, liberal, economics. From 1873 until almost the end of the century there was a period of difficulties called by contemporary business observers and also by some economic historians the "Great Depression", although, of course, it had only very small similarities with the Great Depression of the 1930s, which is what we know by this name. It was followed by another period of lengthy boom which lasted, I suppose, until the end of the First World War; thereafter came the depressed inter-war years which did not really end until after the Second World War, and lastly the greatest of all global booms in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, reaching its peak, as far as we can see, in 1973.

It looks as though we have now entered another period of general economic difficulties. I don't particularly want to stress the periodicity of these fluctuations, though in a rough way they do allow us some predictions. The point I wish to make is that each of these periods of troubles in the past was in some sense the result of the successes of the previous period. Each boom created the conditions which, as we now see, led inevitably to the

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subsequent difficulties. But I am also bound to point out that, until the present, each of these periods of trouble led to changes within the capitalist system which in turn provided solutions for the problems previously raised, and created the conditions for the subsequent secular boom.

Now the point I wish to make is that the times when the viability of the entire capitalist system could be questioned have occurred during these rather lengthy periods of trouble, between 1815 and 1848, beween 1873 and 1896, and between 1917 and 1948. It is during these periods that we can speak of a crisis of capitalism.

Types of Social and Political Conflicts

I have so far talked in what looks like entirely economic terms, but of course we are not talking about the economic mechanism in isolation, even on a world scale; we are talking about societies divided into classes and other social groups, organised in a system and a hierarchy of states with particular forms of political institutions. Moreover, we are not only concerned with the interaction within the international system, but with all these at a particular phase of history. For even if, from the Industrial Revolution on, we can speak of a world dominated by capitalism, we cannot yet speak of—in fact we can never speak of—a uniformly and homogeneously capitalist world. Capitalism, or bourgeois society, captured the world progressively, transformed its various parts which were in very different phases of their own development at various times, and, what is more, progressed and still progresses at an uneven rate. This is true of the poor countries of the capitalist system, and of the so-called developed or industrialised countries of the West, and later Japan. All this is familiar. The Industrial Revolution before 1848 was virtually confined to Britain, Belgium and a few patches in Western Europe and the European seaboard. The Industrial Revolution in Germany and most of the US occurs after 1848, in Scandinavia even later, in Russia from the 1890s, and so on.

So what we are confronted with is a global, historical process, producing at least three types of social and political conflicts, in addition to, or rather in combination with, economic contradictions within capitalist development and complicated, moreover, by the unevenness of the transformation and timing in the various parts of the world. The first of these conflicts is the development, within the developed and developing countries, of a working class and its movements which are in conflict with the capitalists. The second is the resistance and developing rebellion of the dependent world, colonial and semi-colonial, against the domination of, or conquest by, the handful of developed countries. One might perhaps also add at this stage yet another contradiction—though it tends to be of a slightly different kind—the resistance of pre-capitalist strata such as the peasants and petit-bourgeoisie in the developed or semi-peripheral countries, to the process of capitalist development which destroyed their traditional economy and social order.

And finally there is the conflict between the various core states of capitalism themselves, an international conflict, and the various other complications of international rivalry and struggle which are essentially the concern of Bernal's and other people's work in favour of world peace.

The Age of British Power

I do not wish to suggest that these three conflicts exhaust the analysis, but for the sake of simplicity let us just concentrate on them. Now, until about the last quarter of the 19th century none of these three major conflicts could be expected to be acute on a global scale: industrialisation was only just beginning to produce massive proletariats, except in very few places such as Britain. Again, with certain exceptions, capitalism was only beginning to seize hold of the under-developed world from the middle of the 19th century on, and to engage in intensive capitalist investment there. Very little of the world was actually colonised, occupied and ruled from abroad, the major exceptions being India and what today is Indonesia. And since there was for more than half a century only one major industrial power, one workshop of the world and world trader, one power with a genuinely global policy and the means to exercise it—mainly through a global navy—the scope for major international conflict such as general, European or world war, was rather small. In world history this era, stretching from the defeat of Napoleon to the 1870s, perhaps to the end of the century if you like, may be described as the age of British power. It is this sort of world control of which the US has dreamed ever since 1941, and which it thought it had established in the 1950s and 1960s; but if the British era lasted little more than half a century, three-quarters perhaps, what the Americans call the American century turns out to have lasted little more than 25 years. But this is by the way. At all events, the moment when world capitalism was entirely successful, confident and secure, was comparatively brief, the mid-Victorian period, which may possibly be prolonged towards the end of the 19th century. In history this period is preceded by and followed by two ages of revolution: the first from, say, 1776, the date of the American Revolt, to 1848, about 70 odd years, the second the 70 odd years since the first Russian

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Revolution of 1905. This latter age of revolution is evidently not yet over. I shall have a little to say about it later, but before I do so, a word about the first age of revolution.

Why was it revolutionary? Because, as we see, looking back on it, it was a transition to the era of modern industrial capitalism, to bourgeois society; and what made it revolutionary was not only the attempt to break the fetters of earlier social and political orders which were believed to stand in its way, to construct an international system suited to the expansion of capitalism, but, I suggest, two further factors. First, the mobilisation of the common people which this revolutionary transition implied; that is why some phases of it have sometimes been called the age of democratic revolution: peasants, artisans, small shopkeepers, miscellaneous poor, were drawn into the drama of history as actors, rather than simply as crowd extras. Second, difficulties of developing industrial capitalism itself, which still found itself hampered by the very narrowness of the front on which it had broken through. It therefore—I shall not bother about going into details—created both unusually acute social problems, unusual hardships for the emerging, exploited working class, a mass of people whom at this stage it was better at uprooting than at finding work, not even work at the modest wages then believed to be adequate. It also created difficulties for business. All this made the 1830s and the 1840s a period of unusually persistent and acute crisis; so much so that many—not least among the capitalists themselves—feared that the first stage of successful industrial capitalism might also be its last. The spectre of Communism haunted Europe.

Looking back we can see that this was not the end of capitalism but what today would be called in the jargon "teething troubles". But we can properly consider this as the first era of general capitalist crisis. From this crisis capitalism emerged in the 1850s, the years of railways, iron and free trade, and above all the era when the world as a whole was opened to capitalist development (which did not necessarily mean industrialisation), or the exploitation by the developed and developing industrial powers.

Mid-Nineteenth Century Boom

The giant and prolonged boom of the mid-nineteenth century was not based on a new technological breakthrough; by and large it utilised and acknowledged and developed the first Industrial Revolution, coal as a source of energy, the steam-engine as motor-power, iron rather than steel as the basic raw material for capital goods such as machinery and so on. But this technology was now used on a far greater scale internationally both in the countries which were now entering industrialisation, and also to create what is nowadays called an infrastructure in colonial and semi-colonial under-developed areas, railways, port installations—all that sort of thing. These allowed them to be integrated, mainly as suppliers of primary products into the capitalist world economy.

Hence the three major consequences of this boom: first, it replaced industrial world monopoly by Britain, by what you might call world industrial oligarchy by a handful of competing industrial powers among whom the USA and Germany were rapidly overhauling Britain. We shall see that this situation has some parallels with the present. So long as the technology and methods of the first Industrial Revolution were very basic to industrialisation, this did not diminish the industrial role of Britain, but eventually it would do so. Second, in making possible through railways, steamships, etc., an economic trade in bulk goods from hitherto inaccessible areas, it created a number of potential mass exporters of primary products, generally specialising in one or two commodities—American and South Russian wheat, Argentinian and Australasian meat, South Asian tea, Latin American coffee, etc.—each dependent on the developed industrial world for their outlets. When these became actual rather than just potential mass exporters, the result would be a major disruption of agriculture, both in the exporting and importing countries, and also the development of dependent, mono-culture export economies like the banana and coffee republics of Latin America. But once again this only began to happen after the period of boom in the 1870s and 1880s, i.e. during the crisis which followed.

Third, and in consequence of the first two developments, the boom enormously expanded imports and exports of both goods and capital. This world trading and payments system continued to hinge on Britain and in this respect the British economy continued to occupy a key position even after its industrial role began to diminish. However, the boom was particularly quick in getting under way because of two further factors: a rather large reserve of hitherto under-utilised resources, notably the labour which had been uprooted but was available for fairly short-term employment, and the discovery of vast supplies of precious metals, mostly gold, in California and Australia, but also silver in the USA.

The reserves of labour, although reinforced by a considerable degree of immigration from agriculture to industry and to the cities, were still only

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a small part of what was really available in the world. For practical purposes during this period up to the 1880s, the only mass emigration came from Britain, Ireland and Germany. I am deliberately over-simplifying—a little bit—but by and large this is a fair statement. The precious metals as well as the enormous expansion of the international market for goods, whose output may have somewhat lagged behind the demand, helped to create a moderate inflation of prices—it's the only period between 1850 and the end of the century when prices were not tending to drop—and, in short, there was no pressure on business profits. Quite the contrary. Except for greatly improved employment, the workers got little enough out of this boom, but on the whole conditions in developed countries improved after 1860 at least, and the prospects of capitalism looked extremely rosy.

Last Quarter of Nineteenth Century

As I have already implied, the great boom created its own troubles which became obvious in the last quarter of the 19th century. But, with some qualifications which I shall shortly be making, these troubles were, as we can see in retrospect, not fundamental. This is why most economic historians today take the phrase "The Great Depression", which was then widely used, with a very large pinch of salt, and many actually refuse to accept that it was a depression at all. What we find is not a general crisis of capitalism but a shift within it: from the technology of steam and iron and a limited knowledge of chemistry to electricity and oil, steel alloys and non-ferrous metals, turbines and internal-combustion engines; from competitive small firms to corporations, cartels and trusts; from free trade to protection and the partition of the world; from one industrial economy to several rival industrial economies; in short, from mid-19th century capitalism to imperialism or monopoly capitalism. Expansion in terms of output and trade continued faster than before, even during the period when businessmen complained of the squeeze on profits and the rate of interest. Probably agriculture rather than industry took the main brunt of the crisis, but incidentally the consequent rapid fall of the cost of living benefited a lot of workers, notably in Britain.

By the end of the 19th century this period of troubles seemed at an end. Another era of long-term expansion and prosperity for capitalism seemed to be due. Marxists, who had assumed that the crisis would go on, were at a loss. The so-called "crisis of Marxism" associated with the debates in connection with Bernstein's attempts to revise Marx, occurs just about at the moment when the crisis of capitalism gives way to this new era of expansion, around 1897. At about the same time, however, a new phase of discussion about Marxism begins: the word "Marxism" itself emerges and the discussion of imperialism as a new phase of the development of capitalism begins. From then on this is an essential part of Marxist discussions, as witness the writings of Lenin in 1916.

After 1900

Now, even in a purely economic sense, capitalism seemed set for a long and untroubled future around 1900. Even British capitalism, which was by now lumbered with a lot of old-fashioned plant and methods, and both slowing down and falling behind the Germans and Americans, enjoyed the profits of being both the largest empire and increasingly the world's financier, shipper, insurance-broker, and in general the advantages of a world system which rested on the pound sterling. And, in fact, of the three major areas of conflict within the capitalist system, the one which had seemed most dangerous before 1848 now appeared to become quite manageable. During the so-called "Great Depression" mass trade union and labour movements developed in all industrial countries, even to a substantial extent in the USA, mostly socialist and indeed largely Marxist. But, in fact, though these Marxist mass movements continued to salute the flag of revolution every time their leaders opened their mouths in public, we know that they rapidly turned into harmless, social-democratic movements, though not, of course, in the illegal and marginal movements in the peripheral and under-developed countries such as Russia.

On the other hand, the two other types of conflict now became increasingly dangerous. The pressures of imperialism on parts of the colonial and semi-colonial world, including countries on the margins of capitalist development, such as Tsarist Russia, became intolerable. Between 1905 and 1914 breaking-point was reached in three areas. One, the traditional structures of pre-capitalist empires in the Islamic world and Asia collapsed under the pressure of western penetration and conquest: Tsarist Russia, in so far as it belonged to this group, Persia, Turkey and, most significant of all in 1911, China.

Second, social revolution of peasants and workers broke out in Tsarist Russia, the first major social revolution of the 20th century. And, third, in Mexico in 1910 there occurred the first anti-imperialist social revolution in which the workers played no significant part because they did not form a significant part of the population.

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These developments constitute the beginnings of the 20th century age of revolutions. At the same time the tensions of the state system led directly towards an era of international wars such as had not existed since the 18th and early 19th century. The first of these wars, expected, predicted, and in spite of great efforts not avoided, ended the era of triumphant confidence. After 1914 nothing would ever really be the same again. Then after 1917 one-sixth of the world's surface moved out of the capitalist economy and after the Second World War large regions of Europe and Asia joined this movement. Capitalism was not destroyed as a world system, but the First World War opened an era when all three of the main types of conflict became for a time apparently dominant and unmanageable. The threat of social revolution dominated the politics of most of the highly developed capitalist states, though the operative factor at times was not so much the reality of this threat of social revolution as the fear of revolution in the minds of an uncertain, frightened, demoralised ruling class. This was particularly so in the period following the October Revolution and during the Great Depression. International conflict became endemic as a second and even greater world war followed the first after barely 20 years' interval of a very uncertain peace. And the great empires into which the world had been divided at the end of the 19th century now lived on borrowed time. Their end could be predicted.

But what made this entire period so dramatic a crisis was the breakdown of the international capitalist economy which had, by and large, had such an astonishing run for its money—the money being the pound sterling—until 1914. The attempt to reconstruct this international liberal economy after the First World War in the 1920s failed. For one thing the keystone of the whole structure, Britain, was no longer in a position to bear its weight: the great slump of 1929 to 1933 showed just how unsuccessful this attempt had been, and brought the system close to actual collapse for a brief moment. To give you a single illustration: in 1938 world trade was little more than two-thirds of what it had been in 1913, and in 1948 European trade was about 15 per cent below this modest level. There had been no setback of this kind since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

The period of depression, flanked on either side by war and revolution, remains to this day the only time when the future of the world capitalist system really looked as though it was in imminent danger. It did not seem unrealistic to speak in the words of a contemporary book-title of *This Final Crisis*. But, as we can see now, the immediate and urgent danger to capitalism was not due to the fact that the system had come to the end of its possibilities either economically or politically; it had merely come to the end of the possibilities of its 19th-century international structure and the assumptions on which its policy had then been based. The slump forced one country after another to abandon these, and Keynes—who you may remember set out to save rather than to undermine bourgeois society—provided the most familiar, theoretical reasoning behind this change. Actually, in all countries, even including Scandinavia, this change took place through a combination of experiment, accident and the discovery that even the slump of 1929 to 1933 ended of its own accord, and of course subsequently by the necessity of an economy of total war.

Some Errors of Marxists

I am sorry to say that the Marxists failed to recognise this change, and this intellectual and political failure is probably responsible for the revival of a revolutionary left in the late 1960s which largely abandoned the proper analysis of capitalism for a blind and sometimes anti-rational activism, or for general and highly abstract philosophical speculations or for other plainly inadequate theoretical approaches. Let me spell out, somewhat self-critically, a few of our errors: we thought that capitalism could recover only as part of the preparations for war. But this was wrong. The total expenditure on armaments in the post-war period has been vastly greater than ever before. This is not the only, or perhaps not the main, reason why world capitalism during the 1950s and 1960s flourished as never before. We thought liberal, parliamentary democracy was finished, but fascism and similar régimes proved to be temporary aberrations, a reflection of the inter-war depression era rather than the future pattern of capitalist politics; and if the word fascism had not lost all meaning in current political discussion, this would be more clearly realised.

The New Great Boom

The capitalist states of the new great boom moved back to some variant or other of an admittedly very much more bureaucratised and, so to speak, state-administered bourgeois parliamentarianism. We thought that declining capitalism would be unable to compete successfully with the rising rival socialist economy, especially one so much larger than before. But the opposite happened. Capitalism outproduced socialism and even began to re-infiltrate and re-integrate socialist economy from outside by virtue of its

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technological superiority and greater wealth. And so on. So it is clear that the foundations of capitalism have not been fatally undermined by the era of crisis, profound though that crisis was. What happened is rather that capitalism abandoned the old assumption of a self-regulating, competitive market economy and changed its structure accordingly. In the first place the state expanded its economic function in all developed countries, including the USA, to the point where it deliberately planned and managed the economy to a large extent, including an enormous public sector, and in many countries, even a largely nationalised industry. In the second place, the developed economies abandoned the economies of cheap labour and market control of unemployment, thus incidentally making possible a vast extension of the market for consumer goods. In the third place, the concentration of capital created the phenomenon of the modern, supergiant, largely self-financing, independent-of-the-market, transnational corporation. The developed countries entered the era of state monopoly capitalism and welfare capitalism inasmuch as welfare is implicit in full employment as a major government policy which automatically maintains workers' incomes.

I do not want to describe or analyse these far-reaching changes further; but I want just to point out that phrases like "state capitalism" or "state monopoly capitalism" obscure one very important aspect of this new relation between the state and the large corporations which increasingly and in all developed countries constitute the "private sector". The corporations both need the state—I mean the national state—and break its boundaries. They need it, and not only for various other purposes, but because it controls the conditions of political stability which makes the operation of the system possible in the post-1930 period, i.e. full employment and social security. These conditions depend on a constantly rising level of state expenditure. In the USA, for instance, it has risen from about 24 per cent of GNP 1948 to about 32 per cent in 1969. And every time it drops, unemployment rises.

But at the same time the operations of the giant corporations become steadily more transnational, whatever their local base (which in most cases is American), and therefore to some extent they come into conflict with the interests of the economic policy of the national states; for instance, in the matter of the balance of payments. The fact that the United States has run an enormous deficit for many years—in the 1950s and 1960s—which in the end undermined the position of the dollar, was of considerable negative importance to the US Government, but it was an undoubted advantage to the American transnational corporations which used this fact to buy themselves into foreign economies. Hence, incidentally, the post-war international economy has not on the whole been one of mere mercantilism, as some Keynesians anticipated, but a sort of world restoration of free trade and free investment for the benefit of what is now, one might say, the major dynamic element in the capitalist economy, the large transnational corporations.

Given this restructuring of capitalism, its recovery was facilitated by the large reserve of unused resources, industrial capacity of labour available at the end of the war, and by the disproportion which had widened during the period of economic crisis, between the growing capacity to produce and the stagnation of world trade. It was also made possible by the systematic reconstruction, in which incidentally Keynes also took a leading part, of an international trade and payments system in the immediate post-war years. As I have already suggested, this system was in some respects a reversion to the mid-19th century order, only it rested on a US world monopoly instead of a British, on the dollar instead of on the pound sterling. But the unparalleled expansion of capitalism could not have occurred but for important changes in the level of the means of production, just as the previous expansions also occurred not simply by a widening of the market and changes in the structure, but also by changes in the means of production; changes comparable to cotton in the first Industrial Revolution, to railways and iron in the mid-19th century, to the new technology that I have sketched above of the early 20th century.

Three Key Factors

I would like to suggest three changes of this kind, not necessarily in order of importance. First, in addition to the generalisation of the internal combustion engine, the spread of the car from being virtually an American phenomenon to being a world phenomenon, there were the consequences of the technological revolution—in the field of light consumer goods—of electronics and plastics. Most of these, incidentally, like most of the technological revolutions which paid off in the later periods of boom, were made during the inter-war period, or at least during the period of crisis.

The technological revolution in light consumer goods, electronics and plastics, created an enormous number of new consumer goods, and increasingly cheapening consumer goods—you may observe that among the very few goods which still continue, even in the period of inflation, to become cheaper, are things like colour

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television sets. If we look at a country like Japan, the consumer society there is based much less on the car than on the camera and the television set. That was a development in the fifties and sixties.

Second, there is something which perhaps made possible what I have just described, a really quite unprecedented development—at least unprecedented on this scale—an enormous, massive process of urbanisation or sub-urbanisation, the emptying of the countryside. In the 1950s and particularly in the 1960s, for the first time in Western and Central Europe, the old—not only Marxist—prediction of the disappearance of the peasant appeared to be coming true; they disappeared in the physical sense; great numbers of villages were emptied in England, Wales, Scotland, as well as in Central France, and were increasingly colonised by people like most of those in this room, or by their parents, as second homes. This phenomenon is not necessarily confined only to developed countries; urbanisation, sub-urbanisation, the consequent road-building and all the rest of it, also occurred in the peripheral and even in many of the under-developed countries, very notably in a region like Latin America.

Third, I think we have the systematic exploitation, again on quite an unprecedented scale, of ultra-cheap energy. This was not energy that has previously been unknown, because oil, after all, had been significant in the past. However, there was now exploitation of oil on a scale, particularly after the late fifties, which simply had no precedent. Alternative sources of energy were run down—coal mines, for instance, shut down, right, left and centre—in order to use the benefits, the advantages of this bonanza of ultra-cheap oil. We may also, however, note that capitalism began to do two things, one old and one new: first, unlike the inter-war periods, it once again relied very largely on immigrant labour, the abundant and cheap labour on its fringes. There were no longer such large reserves in central capitalist countries with full employment where the only unused labour capacity was that of married women—the percentage of employed married women shot up dramatically. Again there was no precedent for this post-war period rise in women's employment. We now find immigration, very notably controlled immigration in some instances, in Europe, from places as far away as Turkey, or Syria, in some instances, not to mention Asia and the West Indies. But we also find a new phenomenon: the export of the actual plant and industry to the areas where the reservoir of cheap labour was, to places like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore. In the last ten years such transfers have taken place on a large scale, certainly in industries like electronics and cameras. In short, the exploitation of the under-developed world, both in labour and raw materials, by the developed world contributed to an important extent—and some would argue fundamentally—to the great boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

Now during this golden age of capitalism we may note that two out of the three main conflicts I have talked about ceased to be acute, at least for this period. After a few years of sharp confrontation, the USA and the USSR developed a stable *modus vivendi*, and in spite of bloody local wars an immediate world conflict has for several years appeared to be unlikely. Similarly the working class movements in the developed countries, whether under social-democratic or Marxist leadership, also established—there was little else to do—a *modus vivendi* with the existing system, which they screwed for all they were worth for the higher wages and better conditions which at that period the system was perfectly able to grant. At the same time one must note that this particular conflict became complicated and changed by a new tendency. The actual size of the industrial working class tended to decline with the growth of tertiary industries and a number of other groups who, though in some sense wage-earners or salaried workers, were not members of the manual working class or organised in the same way—at least their labour was not organised in the same way—though increasingly they came to be integrated into labour movements, at least as trade union members.

Only the tension between the industrial and the under-developed countries remained alive, given the widening gap between the two and the role of exploitation in the world boom. But once again, with a few localised exceptions such as Cuba and Vietnam, we cannot really regard this conflict as unmanageable in the period, let us say, between 1950 and 1973.

Internal Contradictions

It is not my business to analyse the internal contradictions which led to the end of this golden age, though I will in passing point out three: first, the United States was incapable of maintaining its overwhelming economic and political supremacy, and consequently of maintaining the dollar in its position as the basis of the international payment system. That system, visibly shaken since 1968, is at present on the point of breakdown. The revival or rise of other capitalist economies, notably those in the EEC and Japan, puts the US today in a similar relationship to them as Britain was from the end of the 19th century in relation to Germany and the USA. It

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is no longer true to think of the USA as the overwhelmingly dominant, or even the technologically dominant, country. According to certain calculations, the GNP of West Germany is even now larger than that of the USA. Whether or not this is so, the point is that we are once again in a situation of international oligopoly, whereas in the early 1950s the US was overwhelmingly dominant in its wealth and productive capacity.

International rivalry and tensions, therefore, revived as American hegemony declined. Second, it is now clear that capitalism can choose either unemployment or inflation. However, while a moderate degree of inflation is rather good for business, an excessive amount produces, as we know too well, considerable social and economic political troubles. Moreover, it is possible—and the subject hasn't really been adequately analysed at all because the whole business of the nature of the present economy has always left the economists in a state of great puzzlement—including, I should add, the Marxist economists—it is possible that the structure of capitalism has changed in such a way as to make it increasingly difficult to control either inflation by means of unemployment, or the other way round. Or rather that one would need an unpredictably greater amount of unemployment than was previously believed necessary to control inflation and the other way round.

And third, the now politically independent countries which happen to be sitting on scarce raw materials discovered how to turn the tables on the industrial world by using monopoly themselves, as in the oil crisis. In short, the era when capitalist corporations could operate at their will in a Third World of cheap resources was bound to end. And it did.

The Present Period

So we are once again at the end of another bout of capitalist expansion. I do not say of capitalism, since, again speaking in purely economic and technical terms, the system has not exhausted its possibilities. For instance, it could quite easily extend the method of exporting industrialisation to the underdeveloped world, which it has already started to do, and it would then acquire a very large, cheap labour force once again, for a while. It can, and it almost certainly will, invest heavily in the search for new sources of energy, nuclear and other, and such a massive investment programme might well open up yet another phase of rapid development. Its immediate weaknesses are a combination of the economic and the political, and its vulnerability lies in this combination and not in the insolubility of any specific economic difficulties taken in isolation. Thus the reconstruction of the international monetary system has so far been prevented—and this is for at least four years—essentially by political frictions between the US and the European countries, with the socialist countries and the Third World countries intervening, since they also have their interests in this matter. The USA is no longer in the position it was at the end of the war to impose its own solution.

No one is able to impose a solution in a situation of tension between rival groups. We may take it that even if the control of inflation by employment were technically possible, which, as I have suggested, is not certain, a return to mass unemployment on the inter-war scale is simply politically *not* on, both because governments in industrial countries fear the political consequence, and because the strength of organised labour movements in several of these countries makes such a course extremely difficult, if not impossible. If mass unemployment occurs again, it will not be the result of policy but of the breakdown of policy. The decline of the USA which has led to more freedom of action in smaller countries combined with the general atmosphere of uneasiness and fear—not least in the USA—has once again led to a much more explosive or potentially explosive international situation, from which once again major international conflicts may spring. The Vietnam War was terrible, but nobody seriously expected that it would widen into a world conflagration for more than the occasional moment. On the other hand, the Middle Eastern situation, particularly today and particularly in the last two years, is one which might well become a world crisis, into which the powers might quite well be drawn and from which they might not be able to escape. In this sense, once again, a period of economic difficulties and a period of political and international tensions combine and coincide.

There remains, however, one major and intensifying problem, the widening gap between the industrial and the undeveloped world, much of which, though not all, remained on the margin of disaster even during the best years of the golden age, largely because it had not made social revolutions, and much of it may now be re-entering an age of famine rather than merely an age of poverty. The most recent revolutions —we do not know whether they are the first of a new crop or mere isolated cases—have arisen out of this Third World situation. The changes in Portugal arose out of an anti-colonial rebellion, and the revolution in Ethiopia arose directly—at least it appears to have been stimulated directly —by the experience of famine in that country. So far it remains true to say that capitalism is still

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most vulnerable on its margins, though not on all margins. There is in particular one area in the world to which the great boom has so far brought no gain or much progress, and that is the area of South Asia where eight hundred million people live under conditions which have been little affected even by the last 20 to 25 years of economic expansion and technological progress. This is in some senses the really vulnerable point in the world and the point where global tragedy is likely to begin, if there is to be such a tragedy.

How shall I end this historic survey? Marx showed that the basic contradiction of the system was between the social nature of production and private appropriation. Capitalism got as far as it could by uncontrolled private enterprise until, say, the end of the 19th century. Thereafter it entered a severe crisis. It emerged from this only by turning itself into a managed, monopolist, state capitalism, i.e. by involving as much social organisation as was compatible with it in the system, and by eliminating a large amount of the element of competition and of the market economy. Yet the contradiction remained. It remains within countries and, above all, on a global scale. It is clearly not impossible for capitalism to go yet further along the road of social organisation and planning of production, but while it remains capitalism there must be limits for this process, though at present it would be unwise to make a firm statement about what these limits are. The main strength of the system has evidently lain in the impressive viability and stability and, above all, the powers of recovery of a hard core of the old industrialised economies, Western and Central Europe, the USA and Japan. Let us not underrate the blows that some of them have suffered; wars, slumps and so on, and from which they have so far recovered with one or two exceptions among which this country must be counted. Its main weakness, as I have already suggested, has lain both in the peripheral countries, such as Tsarist Russia once was, and in its relation with the underdeveloped world. However, such breakaways from world capitalism, as there have been, have not so far destroyed the general dominance on a world scale of the capitalist economy. Its main vulnerability has lain in the combination of economic difficulties with internal and international political conflicts. All of these have tended, and perhaps increasingly tended, to combine during the periodic down-swings of the alternating long waves, and at the turning points between these long-term periods, which I sketched at the beginning of this talk.

Discussion Contribution on:

Trotsky and the Popular Front

Monty Johnstone

Part I

Forty years ago, in July-August 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International approved and elaborated the strategy of the Popular Front. An understanding of that congress is essential for a serious appreciation of the subsequent policies and perspectives of Communist Parties all over the world, for which it laid the basis. Similarly, a major part of the criticism of Communist strategy in capitalist countries made from Trotskyist and "leftist" positions today proceeds from foundations laid by Leon Trotsky in his attack on "Popular Frontism" in the 1930s. An analysis of this attack, both theoretically and in relation to the specific situation and possibilities of the Popular Front in France, where it first emerged, may therefore have not only historical interest, but also relevance for Marxist debate on contemporary political strategy.[1]

The Seventh World Congress met to consider the political reorientation made necessary by Hitler's victory in Germany and the growing menace of

[1] For reasons of space the experience of the Spanish People's Front is only passingly referred to, and the anti-imperialist people's fronts in colonial and semi-colonial countries (notably China) are not touched on at all. It is also impossible to go into the related question of the peace front and collective security, opposed by Trotsky in the thirties.

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fascism.[2] It both corrected the serious sectarian mistakes made by the Comintern in the "Third Period", from 1928 to 1934, and made an original contribution to its political thinking and development in new historical conditions.

To Trotsky must go the credit of having throughout the "Third Period" cogently criticised the Comintern's characterisation of Social Democracy as "Social Fascism"[3] and its failure to make a proper distinction between fascism and bourgeois democracy.[4] He had correctly and repeatedly urged that the German Communist Party replace its restrictive policy of the "united front from below" by a consistent effort to build a united front with the Social Democratic Party and its leadership against the Nazi threat.[5] This very fact, however, brings into sharp relief the extreme incorrectness of Trotsky's virulent opposition to the Comintern's subsequent anti-fascist People's Front strategy, which flowed from essentially the same premises as those on which his own earlier criticisms were based.

During the "Third Period" Trotsky had rejected the Comintern's view that the seizure of power by the proletariat was the immediate task, and urged the German Communists to adopt defensive tactics in working for a united front against fascism to protect workers' organisations and rights in the framework of bourgeois democracy.[6] In the period of the Popular Front, however, he was more and more sharply to pose the immediate alternative of fascism or proletarian revolution,[7] condemning the slogan of "defence of democracy" as "reactionary" and "hollow".[8] Moreover, as we shall see, Trotsky's policies in this period implied *in practice* the abandonment of any conception of the united front from either above or below.

Imposed by Stalin?

Already in July 1933 Trotsky called for the foundation of a "Fourth International". He had concluded that with Hitler's victory in Germany the Communist International was "dead for the revolution", having shown its complete political "bankruptcy" and "its organic incapacity to learn, to mend its ways, that is, 'to reform itself'."[9] The declaration of the Comintern Presidium on April 1, 1933 that "the political line and the organisational policy pursued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany . . . was quite correct" in the period before the Nazi coup[10] appeared to give plausibility to his argument. So did the fact that in December 1933 the Comintern Executive still designated Social Democracy as the main social support of the bourgeoisie even in fully Fascist countries and continued to counterpose the tactic of the united front from below to unity from above.[11] Indeed as late as June 1934 L. Magyar, of the Comintern, was attacking Trotsky in *Labour Monthly* for advocating democracy rather than Soviet power as the chief slogan for Germany and

[2] Trotsky alleged that the congress had only been convened "in view of the present danger, represented by the Fourth International". It would, he predicted, "revolve essentially if not solely round the question of the Bolshevik-Leninists (i.e. Trotskyists—M.J.) and the Fourth International." (" Before the Seventh Congress", June 7, 1935, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, hereafter noted as *Writings, 1935-36*, p. 7).

[3] Stalin's formula of 1924 that "Social Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism" (J. Stalin, *Works*, Moscow, 1953, Vol. 6, p. 294) was widely quoted and followed by Communist Parties in this period. (See, e.g. *Communist Review*, London, July 1931, p. 241; *Die Internationale*, Berlin, February 1932, p. 67).

[4] The Eleventh Plenum of the Comintern Executive in 1931 stated that it was necessary to stop drawing a line "between fascism and bourgeois democracy, and between the parliamentary form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and its open fascist form." (Quoted in A. I. Sobolev etc., *Outline History of the Communist International*, Moscow, 1971, p. 313.) Trotsky criticised this thesis in his *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (1932), which is included in L. Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York, 1972), hereafter *Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 154-162.

[5] The Comintern's "Third Period" mistakes are acknowledged and criticised in A. I. Sobolev, *op. cit.*, pp. 280, 291, 309-13, 325, 328-30, 334, 339. Unfortunately, however, the fact that similar criticisms were made *at the time* by Trotsky (see *Struggle against Fascism, passim*) and others like the Brandlerites and the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei (SAP) is not mentioned.

[6] *Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 157-9, 72, 367-8. In his introduction to this volume, however, Ernest Mandel argues that in fighting fascism the workers' movement should "define the struggle for the conquest of power as an immediate goal" (p. 29). And Cliff Slaughter, ideologist of a rival Fourth International to Mandel's, also differs (I fancy unwittingly) from Trotsky in asserting that the idea of a successful check to Nazism without a proletarian revolution was a "petty bourgeois Utopia." (*Fourth International*, London, August, 1968, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 51.)

[7] See particularly his writings opposing the Popular Front in his *Whither France* (various English language editions published in New York, Colombo & London) and *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*, New York, 1973, Part III.

[8] "The Tragedy of Spain" (February 1939), in *The Spanish Revolution, op. cit.*, p. 331.

[9] "It is impossible to remain in the same International" (July 1933), *Writings (1933-34)*, p. 22.

[10] O. Piatnitsky, *The Present Situation in Germany* (London, 1933—second edition), Appendix, p. 44.

[11] Sobolev, *op. cit.*, p. 339. Trotsky criticised this in "Are there no limits to the fall?" (January 1934), *Writings (1933-34)*, pp. 211-12.

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for his "proposal of forming a united front from *above* with the worst of the Social-Fascists . . . ostensibly in order the better to be able to fight against fascism."[12]

However, the conclusions drawn by Trotsky were at best overhasty and based on an impressionistic rather than a fundamental, analytical approach. In the same way as before 1917 he had turned his back on the Bolsheviks, denouncing their dangerous "anti-revolutionary features"[13], Trotsky was now writing off the Third International and the world's Communist Parties, whose most effective period lay ahead of them.

Already on March 5, 1933 the Executive Committee of the Communist International had publicly recommended to Communist Parties "to approach the Central Committees of the Social Democratic Parties belonging to the Labour and Socialist International with proposals regarding joint actions against fascism and against the capitalist offensive."[14] In 1934, under the influence of Dimitrov and the experiences of united action by Communists and Socialists in France, a struggle was under way in the Comintern leadership to correct the sectarian policies of the preceding period. We now know that Dimitrov had to battle hard with Stalin to overcome his opposition to a change in the old line for which he held the major responsibility.[15] Even after having been convinced of the need for a united front with the Socialists, it was Stalin who was behind the Comintern Secretariat's demand for caution in initiating any alliance with the Radical Party.[16] Despite its advice to hold back, delivered by Togliatti, Thorez went ahead in October 1934 with a speech calling for a Popular Front, deemed by the French Party leaders to correspond to the needs of the situation in their country.[17]

In coming round to approve the new policy, Stalin was no doubt influenced by the fact that it clearly complemented Soviet proposals for collective security agreements with the Western democracies to check the aggression of the fascist powers. Both policies sprang from the need to combat fascism that threatened on both national and international planes. Their complementarity is however no proof of the usual Trotskyist contention that the Popular Front was dictated by Stalin to promote the foreign policy "needs of the Soviet bureaucracy", to which the Communist Parties were allegedly forced to subordinate the class struggle in their countries.[18] In fact, the Popular Front grew out of the needs and experiences of working class struggle against fascism and finance capital. It can only be assessed by an examination of how far it showed itself to be the most effective means of promoting that end under the specific circumstances prevailing in the countries where it was applied. "What is most important, that which constitutes the very gist, the living soul, of Marxism (is) a concrete analysis of a concrete situation", insisted Lenin.[19]

It is interesting to find Trotsky himself telling C. L. R. James (Johnson) in a private interview in April 1939 that "*you cannot think of the Comintern as being merely an instrument of Stalin's foreign policy.*" And he went on: "In France in 1934 the Communist Party had declined from 80,000 to 30,000. It was necessary to have a new policy. We do not know the archives of the Comintern, what correspondence passed, etc. At the same time Stalin was seeking a new foreign policy. From one side and the other we have these tendencies which go to make the new turn. They are different sides of the same process. . . . The French Communist Party is not only an agency of Moscow, but a national organisation with members of parliament, etc."[20]

Such statements as these, made privately to a

[12] L. Magyar, "The Bankruptcy of Trotskyism", *Labour Monthly*, June 1934, p. 369. Emphasis in original.

[13] L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (New York, 1965), p. 112.

[14] *Labour Monthly*, April 1933, p. 268.

[15] J. Mérot, *Dimitrov: un revolutionnaire de notre temps* (Paris, 1972), pp. 184-7. Cde. Merot used detailed information obtained from the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

[16] G. Ceretti, *A l'Ombre des Deux T* (Paris, 1973), pp. 158-61, where the author quotes what Togliatti told him at the time.

[17] *ibid.* Cde. Ceretti was present at the discussion between Thorez, Duclos and the Comintern's representatives. See also M. Thorez, *Fils du Peuple* (Paris, 1960), pp. 95-102; Duclos, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1968), Vol. 1, pp. 420-1. The idea that Communist Parties should also start talks with petty bourgeois and peasant parties had already been mooted in a committee meeting apparently in August or September 1934 by Manuilsky, who alone among the Comintern leaders present had supported Dimitrov in his discussion with Stalin. (Sobolev, *op. cit.*, p. 359; Mérot, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7.) Later Stalin was to congratulate Thorez for the Popular Front initiative. (Thorez, *op. cit.*, p. 102.)

[18] A recent exposition of this can be found in Tom Kemp's article "A Congress of Liars" in *Workers Press*, May 6, 1975. Readers familiar with that particular Trotskyist organ, where vituperation and conspiracy theory so frequently replace analysis, will not be surprised that it concludes that the Seventh World Congress "was a congress of lies, organised and addressed by liars in order to deceive the working class and cover up the betrayals of Stalinism"!

[19] V. I. Lenin, "*Kommunismus*" (June 1920), in his *Collected Works* (Moscow and London, 1963-70), hereafter *C.W.*, Vol. 31, p. 166.

[20] *Writings (1938-39)*, p. 62. My emphasis.

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leading Trotskyist of the time, completely contradict his public pronouncements that the Popular Front was a "criminal policy dictated by Moscow", that "the Politbureaus of the Communist Parties all consist of paid agents of the GPU" and that the Comintern had become "a completely submissive apparatus in the service of Soviet foreign policy, ready at any time for any zigzag whatever."[21]

Seventh World Congress

To have made a serious and responsible critique of the strategy of the Popular Front Trotsky would have had to proceed from an analysis of the argumentation of the Seventh World Congress, and in the first instance of Dimitrov's report and reply to discussion. In fact, Trotsky never realised his declared intention of drawing up in a special pamphlet or series of articles the "theoretical and political balances" of this crucial congress.[22] Indeed his windily dismissive references to Dimitrov's extremely rich report as "wordy and unsubstantial" make it doubtful whether he ever bothered to study it properly, as does his quite extraordinary statement that the call for elected committees of action as the mass support for the People's Front was "perhaps the only progressive idea in the entire resolution" on Dimitrov's report.[23] It is significant that the National Education Department of the American Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, in their brochure *United Front vs. People's Front*, can find nothing better to produce on the theory of the Popular Front as set out by Dimitrov than two chapters from James Burnham's *The People's Front: The New Betrayal*, (1937) in which the then Trotskyist leader proceeds from the "Third Period" proposition that "there is no basic *social* conflict between bourgeois democracy and fascism."[24]

Dimitrov started from a recognition that the "accession to power of fascism is not an *ordinary succession* of one bourgeois government by another, but a *substitution* of one state form of class domination of the bourgeoisie—bourgeois democracy—by another form—open terrorist dictatorship."[25] The Communists' attitude to bourgeois democracy could not be the same under all circumstances. In the revolutionary upsurge of 1917-20 they had fought under the banner of proletarian dictatorship, whilst the forces of counter-revolution had gathered around the standard of bourgeois democracy for the defence of capitalism. The situation was quite different in the thirties. "Now," said Dimitrov, "the fascist counter-revolution is attacking bourgeois democracy in an effort to establish the most barbaric regime of exploitation and suppression of the toiling masses. Now the toiling masses of the capitalist countries are faced with the necessity of making a *definite* choice, and of making it today, not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism."[26]

The first thing that had to be done was to establish a united front of the working class parties and organisations without conditions except that it be "*directed against fascism, against the offensive of capital, against the threat of war, against the class enemy.*"[27]

Alliance with Middle Strata

Whilst the "*main and immediate task*" was seen as such a workers' united front, the resolution on Dimitrov's report declared: "In striving to unite, under the leadership of the proletariat, the struggle of the toiling peasants, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the toiling masses of the oppressed nationalities, the Communists must seek to bring about the establishment of a wide *anti-fascist* people's front on the basis of the proletarian united front, supporting all those specific demands of these sections of the toilers which are in line with the fundamental interests of the proletariat."[28]

Maurice Thorez in his speech had especially emphasised the need for a correct approach to these strata. "The masses of the people in town and country, the middle classes, and the peasants in particular, play a very important historic role. But

[21] *Whither France?* (Colombo, 1961), p. 117; *The Case of Leon Trotsky* (London, 1937), p. 195; *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York, 1945), pp. 186-7.

[22] "The Stalinist Turn" (September 1935), *Writings (1935-36)*, p. 13.

[23] "The Comintern's Liquidation Congress" (August 1935), *ibid.*, p. 11; *Whither France?*, p. 117. His statement about the resolution is all the more ridiculous in that many points are made in it similar to those which he himself had been urging on the Comintern up to 1934!

[24] *United Front vs. People's Front* (New York, December 1972), p. 23. Emphasis in original. Presumably Burnham's arguments appear convincing to the American Trotskyists who reprint him. Burnham himself was however less convinced of his main propositions, admitting three years later that "on the grounds of beliefs and interests . . . I have for several years had no place in a Marxist party," (Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, New York, 1965, Appendix, p. 211) and then proceeding via his *Managerial Revolution* (1941) to the concoction of such cold war classics as the *Coming Defeat of Communism* (1950).

[25] G. Dimitrov, *The United Front* (London, 1938), p. 12. Emphasis in original.

[26] *ibid.*, p. 110. Emphasis in original.

[27] *ibid.*, p. 32. Emphasis in original.

[28] *Resolutions of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International* (London, 1935), pp. 7, 11. Emphasis in original.

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this role is never an independent one; they either fall under the influence of the big bourgeoisie, of capital, and become the tool of its policy, or they ally themselves with the working class."[29] This was, of course, a fundamental Marxist tenet that Trotsky himself often proclaimed.[30] But, as in his controversies with Lenin before 1917 about Russian perspectives, [31] he opposed the conception of such an alliance taking the form of an *agreement between parties* and possibly culminating in a coalition government of them.

Hitherto the Communist International had only envisaged such an alliance of proletarian with democratic bourgeois and petty bourgeois *parties* in countries which had not yet completed their bourgeois democratic revolutions. In other countries, where the Communists had seen struggle for the destruction of capitalism as "their immediate mission"[32], there had been no basis for an alliance with non-socialist parties, which did not share this aim. There it had been a question of working to win the middle strata directly to support the workers' parties.

The rise of fascism, however, created a new situation. Already at the beginning of the thirties Trotsky had correctly appreciated that the immediate task was a defensive struggle against the fascist threat to democratic rights.[33] Explaining the need for a united front of Communist and Social Democratic parties he had demonstrated, by implication, the basis for a still wider anti-fascist front, including democratic bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties. "Unless one plays with words," he had written, "fascism is certainly not common to all bourgeois parties; the fascist party is a *special* bourgeois party, which is geared to special conditions and tasks and is sharply opposed to other bourgeois parties." Admittedly the mutual hostility of bourgeois parties was very relative. However "the fact that all bourgeois parties from fascism to the Social Democratic Party place the defence of bourgeois domination above their programmatic differences neither does away with their specific characteristics, nor their struggle against each other, *nor our task of taking advantage of this struggle*."[34]

For the first fifteen years of their existence the Communist Parties in countries like France and Spain had been unable to obtain any significant success in winning the peasantry of their countries for an alliance with the working class on the basis of an immediate programme of Soviet power. Their experiences certainly did not lend support to Trotsky's assertion in 1935 that the only solution was for the proletariat to "speak the *language of revolution to the peasants*."[35] Where the peasants and urban middle strata did not give their support to right wing parties, they voted in the main for left-wing bourgeois parties like the French Radicals and the Spanish Republican Left. In the mid-thirties an agreement with these parties was the condition for any anti-fascist alliance of the working class and middle strata, who still formed the majority of the population and constituted a potential mass basis for fascism, as had actually been the case in Germany. Marxists had to recognise, as Dimitrov pointed out, that "these masses must be taken as they are, and not as we should like to have them", with a view to raising their consciousness in the course of a united struggle against fascism.[36]

Opposing the Popular Front when it came into existence in France, Trotsky claimed that "the first step to an alliance with the petty bourgeoisie is the breaking up of the bloc with the bourgeois Radicals."[37] This approach was at the very best open to the same objection that he had himself made to the pre-1933 policy of the German Communist Party of unrealistically calling for a united front of the working class without and against the leaders of the Social Democratic party that the bulk of them followed. [38]

Particularly unjustified was Trotsky's representation of this class alliance between the parties based on the working class and those supported by the democratic petty bourgeoisie as "the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie". [39] In fact, the People's Front was directed precisely against the most powerful and dangerous

[29] M. Thorez, *The Successes of the Anti-Fascist United Front* (London, 1935), p. 23.

[30] See, e.g., *Whither France?*, pp. 10-11.

[31] Trotsky, presenting in 1929 an account of these controversies, states quite correctly that "the theoretical as well as the political dispute among us was not over the collaboration of the workers and peasants as such, but over the programme of this collaboration, its party forms and political methods." (*The Permanent Revolution, op. cit.*, p. 66.) However, in trying to minimise his disagreement with Lenin, he downplays the significance of this. See also Lenin, *C.W.*, Vol. 15, pp. 370-4.

[32] Theses on Tactics adopted by Third Comintern Congress (July 1921), in J. Degras, Ed., *The Communist International (1919-1943)—Documents* (London, 1956), Vol. 1, p. 248.

[33] See, e.g., *Struggle against Fascism*, p. 72.

[34] L. Trotsky, *Die österreichische Krise* (Vienna, 1929), p. 11. My emphasis.

[35] *Whither France?* p. 94. Emphasis in original.

[36] *The United Front*, p. 25.

[37] "The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International" (July, 1936), *Writings (1935-36)*, p. 33.

[38] *Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 165-170.

[39] L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution, op. cit.*, p. 309.

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sections of the bourgeoisie, constituted in France by the "two hundred families" (the financial oligarchy holding the controlling levers of wealth and power) and in Spain by the financial oligarchy that was allied to the big landowners. In both countries the bulk of the bourgeoisie opposed the Popular Front with the utmost virulence, doing everything possible to undermine and defeat it in France and carrying things in Spain to the point of backing Franco's fascist rebellion against it. The fact that in the struggle against the fascist threat to republican institutions and liberties it was possible through the Popular Front to detach sections of the liberal bourgeoisie from the main force of the class enemy was surely fully in accord with Trotsky's earlier insistence on the need to take advantage of the struggle between different bourgeois parties in fighting fascism.

Lenin's 'Two Tactics'

Lenin, in his *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905) had set out the concept of two stages of revolution: the first, a bourgeois democratic revolution to overthrow tsarism and establish a democratic republic; the second, a proletarian revolution to establish socialism. He saw this as applicable only to Russia and by analogy to other countries that had not yet carried through their bourgeois democratic revolutions. One should not "mix up different historical periods" by comparing Russia with Europe "where these (bourgeois democratic) revolutions were completed long ago" and where "the real political content of Social Democratic work is to prepare the proletariat for the struggle for power against the bourgeoisie," he wrote in 1910.[40]

But in the same way that Engels had pointed out in the 1880s that a monarchist restoration in France—even though a Bonapartist monarchy established on the basis of bourgeois property relations—"would result in the struggle for the re-establishment of the *bourgeois* republic coming on to the agenda again,"[41] so did the defence of the bourgeois republic become in the 1930s the next stage for a country like France threatened by fascism. Thus, by a cruel trick of history, Lenin's strategy for a semi-feudal autocracy now acquired relevance for a country that had carried through its bourgeois revolution one and a half centuries before and where the next stage had for long been seen by Marxists as a Socialist revolution.

It understandably took time for Communist Parties to recognise and adjust themselves to this.[42] But to Trotsky, who had developed his theory of "permanent revolution" in opposition to the Bolshevik strategy for Tsarist Russia, such a conception of stages in developed capitalist countries was utterly unacceptable "Menshevism".[43]

United Front In France

The basis for the French Popular Front was laid by the great extra-parliamentary struggles of the French workers from February 1934 which led to the Unity of Action Pact signed in July of that year by the Communist and Socialist Parties.

The kind of united front against fascism that Trotsky had for years been advocating had come into being in France. Now, however, he was to shift his ground, denouncing "the one-sided, almost maniacal (sic) programme of immediate demands" on which the united front was based.[44] What was required, he argued in October 1934, was "a programme of revolution." No real improvement in the situation was conceivable "without the revolutionary invasion of the right of capitalist property." He insisted that "the political campaign of the united front must base itself upon a well elaborated *transition programme*, i.e. on a system of measures which with a workers' and peasants' government can assure the transition from capitalism to socialism . . . If the revolutionary proletariat does not take power, fascism will inevitably take it!"[45]

The Pact had laid down steps for "the self-defence of workers' meetings, demonstrations, organisations and workers' leaders," and mutual assistance against fascist attacks.[46] Trotsky decided

[40] Lenin, "The Historical Meaning of the Inner-Party Struggle in Russia". (September-November 1910), *C.W.*, Vol. 16, p. 379.

[41] Engels to Bernstein, August 27, 1883, in K. Marx/F. Engels, *Werke* (Berlin, 1967), Vol. 36, p. 54.

[42] Although the basis for such a recognition was laid at the Seventh World Congress, it was still some time before it was fully understood. Hence Dimitrov in his report denied that there could be any "'democratic intermediate stage' lying between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat." (*The United Front*, p. 75) and French Communists at that time were chanting "Soviets Everywhere!" on Popular Front demonstrations. A year later, in September 1936, however, Dimitrov spoke of the type of democratic republic for which the Spanish people were fighting as perhaps really representing "a special form of the democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry", and indicated that a similar development could take place in such developed capitalist countries as France, Belgium and Holland. (*Problems of CPSU History*, in Russian, 1963, No. 3, p. 13).

[43] "Does the Soviet Government still follow the Principles adopted 20 Years ago?" (January 1938), *Writings (1937-38)*. p. 171.

[44] *Whither France?*, pp. 55-56.

[45] *ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

[46] *Labour Monthly*, October 1934, p. 624, which carries the text of the Pact.

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to go one better and raise the slogan "Arm the proletariat and the revolutionary peasants!"[47]—which was not only quite unacceptable to the Socialists, but was also highly provocative in the circumstances prevailing in France at that time.

When the Comintern had first developed its policy of the united front in 1921-22 it had made it clear that what was entailed was "a common fight for the immediate and urgent needs of the proletariat" on which agreement could be reached with the reformist organisations.[48] Lenin argued that in preparatory negotiations with the representatives of the Second and the "Two-and-a-Half" Internationals, the Comintern should put forward "only questions that have a direct bearing on practical joint action by the working masses and touching on matters that are recognised as indisputable in the official press statement of each of the three participants."[49] Trotsky himself had emphasised at this time that "unity of front presupposes our readiness, within certain limits and on specific issues, to correlate in practice our actions with those of reformist organisations."[50]

The offensive revolutionary programme that Trotsky put forward for the united front from the autumn of 1934—whilst accepting that "the proletariat finds itself in a defensive situation"[51]—was something very different. It could only have led to the break-up of the united front so recently concluded in France. It had not the slightest chance of being accepted by either the leaders or the membership of the French Socialist Party, which he was to describe as "not a revolutionary party (nor) even a proletarian party. It is petty bourgeois, not only in its policies but also in its social composition."[52] Indeed Trotsky's French followers, who had entered the Socialist Party as a faction in the autumn of 1934, obtained out of the 3,000 votes cast at that party's Mulhouse congress the next June only 105 for their policy, and thereafter withdrew or were expelled.[53]

The proletarian united front should therefore not be seen as Trotsky's alternative to the People's Front, since the advanced demands on which he insisted were in fact incompatible with either. Finally in June 1936 he envisaged the French working class being "drawn into the impending conflict not only *without* the leadership of its traditional organisations" but also *against* these organisations[54]—a scenario which quite explicitly excluded any kind of united front.[55]

Joining with the Radicals

The Popular Front, in which the Radicals joined with the traditional workers' parties from July 1935, was not a repetition of the old parliamentary "cartel" of Socialists and Radicals. Far from "*putting a brake* upon the mass movement"[56], it greatly stimulated it, as the Communists sought to give it a solid extra-parliamentary basis by "covering the country with an immense network of committees" elected in towns and villages, in factories and in the army.[57] The prospect of electoral success that the Popular Front afforded was a powerful factor in generating widespread support and activity.

Such a prospect was only made possible by the alliance with the Radical Party, which Trotsky predicted was about to "disappear from the scene" having outlived itself.[58] In fact, whilst the Radicals were to lose half a million votes in the 1936 general election, the one and a half million votes that they received (as many as the Communist Party) showed that they were still a force to be reckoned with. There was no contradiction between encouraging the current of democratic, anti-fascist opinion among the Radicals, which was to bring them into the Popular Front, and at the same time winning hundreds of thousands of their supporters from Radicalism to Socialism, as was to happen in the

[47] *Whither France?*, p. 29.

[48] ECCI-RILU Manifesto on the United Front, in Degras, Ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 316-9.

[49] Lenin to Bukharin & Zinoviev, February 1, 1922, *C.W.*, Vol. 42, p. 393.

[50] L. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (New York, 1953), Vol. 2, p. 95.

[51] *Whither France?*, p. 75.

[52] "A New Turn is Necessary" (June 1935), *Writings (1934-35)*, p. 317. But cf the French Trotskyist OCI's *Quelques Enseignements de notre Histoire* (Paris, 1970), p. 13: "The Socialist Party's social composition in 1934 was largely working class."

[53] J. Rabaut, *Tout est possible! Les 'gauchistes' français, 1929-1944* (Paris, 1974), pp. 164, 180-1.

[54] *Whither France?*, p. 162. Emphasis in original.

[55] In Spain Trotsky's demands were such that he was aware that they did not even provide a basis for unity with his old comrade Nin and the bulk of the semi-Trotskyist POUM. Therefore, he wrote, "the revolutionists must turn to the workers, to the depths, against the vacillations and waverings of Nin. Unity of the proletarian front does not mean capitulation to the centrists." ("Is Victory Possible in Spain?", April 1937, *The Spanish Revolution*, p. 259.)

[56] *Whither France?*, p. 131. Emphasis in original.

[57] *Les Cahiers du bolchévisme*, December 15, 1935, quoted in G. Lefranc, *Juin 36* (Paris, 1966), p. 80; M. Thorez, Report to Eight Congress of French Communist Party (January 1936), *Oeuvres de Maurice Thorez*, Book 3, Vol. 11, pp. 106-7.

[58] *Whither France?*, pp. 12-13, 15. Trotsky was failing to appreciate that "we must *not* regard what is obsolete *to us* as something obsolete *to a class, to the masses.*" (Lenin, "*Left Wing*" *Communism—an Infantile Disorder*, 1920, *C.W.*, Vol. 31, p. 58. Emphasis in original).

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period culminating in the elections of April/May 1936 which reflected this.[59]

As these elections approached, alarm mounted on the Right, which desperately sought to avert a Popular Front victory. An article in *International Socialism* correctly describes the position: "Between them the workers' parties and the Radicals had a 'natural majority'. . . . The Right's only hope was to split off the Radicals, or at least a major section of them." [60] The policies urged by Trotsky would, of course, have given the Right what it sought, but the readiness of the Communists to compromise thwarted the reactionaries' plans. A limited programme of anti-fascist, democratic, social and economic measures, realisable within the framework of capitalism, was agreed on.[61] Candidates of the Popular Front parties arranged in the second ballot, provided by the French electoral system, to withdraw in favour of whichever candidate of the allied parties was in the lead. Trotsky opposed this and expressed his regret that "revolutionary working class candidates" had not been "run in all electoral districts in which the Communists and Socialists withdrew in favour of the Radicals"[62], although this would obviously have led to the election of more reactionaries.

The elections brought the expected Popular Front victory. Whereas between them the Socialists and Communists obtained only 218 out of 618 seats, the Popular Front as a whole won an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies with 378 seats, so that a Popular Front government could be formed by the Socialist Blum.

"The French Revolution has Begun!"

Few historians would agree with Trotsky's picture of the Popular Front "lulling the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions (and) paralysing their will to struggle."[63] The *International Socialism* article quoted above recognises that it "both responded to and encouraged a rising wave of class struggle."[64] Encouraged by their victory at the polls, workers all over France embarked in May and June 1936 on their great sit-in strikes, in which Communist trade unionists played a leading part and the Communist Party gave its full support. They were demanding improved wages and working conditions, a forty-hour week, paid holidays, trade union rights and shop stewards and the negotiation of agreements on both an industry and a factory basis.

Having stated the previous year that "one would hardly expect a spontaneous strike wave in France",[65] Trotsky now proclaimed from his Norwegian exile: "The French Revolution has Begun!"[66] This was the sort of "infatuation with the revolutionary phrase" with which Lenin had again and again reproached Trotsky. The sit-in strikes of May and June 1936 represented a striking growth of working class militancy, initiative and organisation. But Trotsky offered not a morsel of evidence to back his claim that they "revealed the whole-hearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system."[67]

Even if all the two million workers who struck during this period for their economic demands could have been led to follow a Communist call to revolution, would they have been able to carry with them the other four million or so industrial workers? And could they have obtained the support of the majority of the peasantry, still the largest section of the French people?[68] What serious evidence was there of the readiness of the middle strata "to support a bold revolutionary initiative on the part of the

[59] The great demonstration organised by the Communist and Socialist Parties on May 24, 1936, in memory of the Paris Communards showed that the Popular Front created favourable conditions for independent Socialist activity and propaganda. Yet for Trotsky the demonstration was "the most convincing and most unalterable disavowal of the People's Front policy by working class Paris"! (*Whither France?*, p. 145)

[60] R. Kirkwood, "The fire last time: France 1936", *International Socialism*, No. 56, March 1973, p. 15.

[61] See M. Thorez, *France Today and the People's Front* (London, 1936), pp. 192-200.

[62] *Whither France?*, p. 145. Contrast this with the tactics of the Bolsheviks in Tsarist Russia where they opposed both tsarism and the liberal bourgeoisie, "never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or second ballots)". (Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 72).

[63] "The New Revolutionary Upsurge" (July 1936), *Writings (1935-36)*, p. 35.

[64] R. Kirkwood, *loc. cit.*

[65] *Whither France?*, p. 64.

[66] *ibid.*, p. 150. The cry was immediately taken up by his French followers. See Appeal of Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste, in *Lutte Ouvrière*, June 19, 1936, in J-P. Rioux, Ed., *Révolutionnaires du Front Populaire* (Paris, 1973, p. 188.) Similar claims were made by Trotskyists throughout the world in May/June 1968. cf. P. Frank, *The Worker-Student Uprising of 1968* (New York, 1968), p. 2: "May 1968 will go down in history as the month the French socialist revolution began." In similar vein, *Workers Press*, organ of the Workers' Revolutionary Party, on October 2, 1974, carried as its main front page headline: "Portugal: SOCIALIST REVOLUTION HAS BEGUN."

[67] *The Death Agony of Capitalism* (Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, written by Trotsky, 1938), SLL edition (London, 1970), p. 13.

[68] Around 1930 the total population of France was 42 million of whom 14 million belonged to the peasantry, 12 million to the petty bourgeoisie and 13 million to the working class, including 9 million factory workers and their families (C. Willard etc., *Le Front populaire*, Paris, 1972, p. 18).

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proletariat", which in its turn would have needed to have been ready "to venture upon the most heroic efforts and sacrifices" to establish the "political premises of a revolution" as set out by Trotsky himself?[69]

Supposing that Trotsky was right that the majority who voted Communist were thereby saying "we want you to do the same as the Bolsheviks in their country in October 1917"[70], would they have been able to command a majority in the country, which Trotsky, following Lenin, had indicated was necessary for a successful revolution?[71]

The French Communist Party did not think so. That is why, after the strike movement had obtained important concessions from the employers in the Matignon agreements of June 7, Thorez was to declare: "There is no question of taking power at the present time. . . . If the aim at the present moment is to obtain satisfaction for the economic demands whilst progressively raising the consciousness and organisation of the mass movement, then we need to know how to end the strike as soon as satisfaction has been obtained."[72] This was no more a "betrayal", as the Trotskyists have never ceased to declaim, than was the action of Lenin and the Bolsheviks who in June and July 1917 "held back and shaped into a peaceful demonstration" the "spontaneous excitement" of the Petrograd masses, since they could not at that time count on the support of the peasantry and "consequently could not have the majority of the people" behind them.[73]

(*This article will be concluded in the November issue*)

[69] L. Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1936), p. 1024.

[70] *Whither France?*, p. 143. Actually this proposition is more than dubious, since the Communists fought the election on the basis of a militant struggle to implement the People's Front programme, not an imminent Socialist insurrection.

[71] "The proletariat will not be able to wrest power from the bourgeoisie unless the majority of workers passionately devotes itself to this task and the exploited, throughout the whole people, in their majority place their confidence in the proletariat"—Trotsky (May 28, 1931), *Ecrits* (Paris, 1959), Vol. 3, p. 471. cf. Lenin (October 1917): "If the revolutionary party has not a majority among the front ranks of the revolutionary classes *and in the country generally*, there can be no question of insurrection." (*Selected Works*, Moscow/London, n.d.—1937?—Vol. 6, p. 293. My emphasis.)

[72] *Fils du Peuple*, p. 127.

[73] Lenin, Letter to Comrades (October 1917), *C.W.*, Vol. 26, p. 210. Trotsky made the same point on these events: "To convert the July movement into an insurrection would have meant almost certainly to bury the revolution. . . . Thanks to the party's taking its place boldly at the head of the movement, it was able to stop the masses at the moment when the demonstration began to turn into an armed test of strength." (*History of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 593-4.)

Continued from page 291

A Review of Perry Anderson's "Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism" and "Lineages of the Absolutist State" by Prof. Eric Hobsbawm, Birkbeck College.

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Forward to the Future

Le Duan

First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Workers' Party

(We print below a translation of the speech delivered in Hanoi on May 15, 1975, by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Workers' Party, at a meeting to celebrate victory. The subheads are ours. The text is slightly abbreviated.)

Compatriots and combatants throughout the country,

All Party Comrades,

Comrades and friends,

Today, with boundless joy, throughout the country our 45 million people are jubilantly celebrating the great victory we have won in the general offensive and uprising this spring of 1975, in completely defeating the war of aggression and the neo-colonialist rule of US imperialism, liberating the whole of the southern half of our country so dear to our hearts, and gloriously ending the longest, most difficult and greatest patriotic war ever waged in the history of our people's struggle against foreign aggression.

We hail our glorious Fatherland from now on definitively rid of the slavery of foreign domination and the scourge of partition. We hail the beautiful land of Vietnam from Lang Son to the Cape of Ca Mau, from now on completely independent and free, and independent and free for ever.

We hail the new era in our nation's 4,000-year history—an era of brilliant prospects for the development of a peaceful, independent, reunified, democratic, prosperous and strong Vietnam, an era in which the labouring people have become the complete masters of their destiny and will pool their physical and mental efforts to build a plentiful and happy life for themselves and for thousands of generations to come.

The Sources of Victory

This glory belongs to our great President Ho Chi Minh, the outstanding national hero who brought fame to our land, the first Vietnamese Communist who founded and trained our party, who steered the ship of the Vietnamese revolution through many a storm to enable it to reach the shore of glory today. In this stirring atmosphere of total victory, our hearts are filled with great emotion at the memory of our beloved Uncle Ho, and we seem to hear again his teaching:

> "No matter what difficulties and hardships lie ahead, our people are sure of total victory. The US imperialists will certainly have to quit. Our Fatherland will certainly be reunified. Our fellow-countrymen in the south and in the north will certainly be reunited under one roof. We, a small nation, will have earned the signal honour of defeating through heroic struggle two big imperialisms—the French and the American—and of making a worthy contribution to the world national liberation movement."

We are very proud to have thoroughly carried out these recommendations of President Ho Chi Minh in his sacred Testament.

This glory belongs to our heroes, martyrs, compatriots and comrades who have sacrificed their lives for the independence and freedom of the country, for the happiness of the people, for our sacred duty to the nation and our noble internationalist obligation. The Fatherland and the people will for ever remember the services of those martyrs, the loyal sons and daughters of the people whose example of courage will shine eternally! . . .

Today, the day of triumph of the nation, from this historic land of Thang Long, the heart of the country, we send our boundless love and our warmest congratulations to our compatriots and comrades in the south who, battling against waves and wind for 30 years on end, have struggled unflinchingly and indomitably for the great cause under the banner of the National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam and courageously raised the great storm that has finally swept away the enemy, thus adding still greater renown to the glorious tradition of the "Bronze Citadel" of the Fatherland. We offer our warmest congratulations to our compatriots in the heroic north who over the past decades have been building socialism with industry and thrift, fearing no difficulty and

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sparing no sacrifice, who have sent tens of thousands of their sons to the front line to kill the aggressors, and defeated the war of destruction of the US aggressors while firmly defending the north, the powerful base of the revolution in the whole country.

The Revolutionary Army

This glory belongs to the heroic Vietnam people's armed forces, the revolutionary army of the people, completely "loyal to the country and the people and able to fulfil any task, overcome any hardship, and defeat any enemy". Armed at the beginning with mere wooden spears and flintlock, it has grown up at a stupendous speed, like Phu Dong[1] into powerful units which have won all of the hundreds of battles fought across the land of Vietnam. We send our deepest love and the expression of our boundless pride to all the officers and men of the Vietnam People's Army. We send our warmest congratulations to the officers and men of all three categories of armed forces and of all arms and services all who, during the 55 recent historic days, fought with peerless valour, great resourcefulness and tremendous power and speed, smashing the enemy and winning resounding victories to give a still brighter hue to their traditional "Determined to Fight and to Win" banner.

The Party

This glory belongs to our party, the experienced and staunch vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, faithful representative of the vital interests and legitimate aspirations of the people and the entire nation of Vietnam, the leader and organiser of all the victories of the Vietnamese revolution. Our party has skilfully and successfully combined the revolutionary science of Marxism-Leninism—the culmination of the intelligence of mankind—with the extraordinary revolutionary energy and the inexhaustible creativeness of our people, with the tradition and quintessential qualities of our nation, to work out a correct, creative, independent and sovereign line, mobilise, foster and bring into play all potentials of the country and all forces of the nation, and to combine these with the strength of our times into a tremendous aggregate force, able to defeat all enemies. The Vietnamese communists, with their tradition of solidarity and unity, with their iron determination, their courage before all trials, have always marched in the van of the great struggle of the people, and have proved equal to the glorious tasks assigned them by history and the nation.

Our victory is the victory of the unbreakable solidarity of the three Indochinese peoples thoroughly tested in the flames of struggle against the common enemy. In this day of great joy, we hail the great victories of the fraternal peoples of Laos and Cambodia, and express to those companions-in-arms, who have been fighting in the same trench as we have, our boundless gratitude and our unshakeable solidarity.

Patriotism and Internationalism

Our victory is also the victory of the forces of socialism, national independence, democracy and peace throughout the world, who have supported us in the struggle against aggressive US imperialism. On behalf of the Vietnam Workers' Party and the entire people of Vietnam, we express our most profound gratitude to the Soviet Union, China and the other fraternal socialist countries, and to all Communist and workers' parties, for the very great and precious support and assistance they have given out of their noble internationalist attachment to us. We sincerely thank the working class of all countries in the world, the nationalist countries, the various international democratic organisations, and the whole of progressive mankind for having provided vigorous encouragement and support to our war of resistance for national salvation. To progressive people in the United States who out of their love for peace and justice have given their sympathy and support to our people's just struggle we send our greetings of friendship.

Fellow-countrymen and combatants,
Comrades and friends,

The victory of our war of resistance against the US aggressors and for national salvation is the victory of the banner of *national independence*, the victory of a patriotism forged by thousands of years of glorious effort to build and defend our nation and now raised to a new height by the party of the working class. "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom." This truth has served as the bugle-call urging our people, generation after generation, to rush forward and chase out all invaders and traitors. From it our people have drawn the irresistible strength to break the fetters of old colonialism and, today, the yoke of neo-colonialism.

This victory is the victory of *socialism*, the highest ideal of mankind and the most profound aspiration of the labouring people, which has become a reality over half of our country, as well as for one-third of mankind, a system in which the people have become the real masters,

[1] Phu Dong, legendary hero who routed an invading army, riding on his fire-breathing iron horse.

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free from the exploitation of man by man, a system in which everyone lives in independence and freedom, has enough food and clothing, receives proper education and enjoys a rich and healthy moral life. Such a system is indeed the source of the inexhaustible strength of the people in the north, and a great stimulus to our compatriots in the south.

Defeat of Imperialism

There can be no genuine independence and freedom for the nation unless the labouring people are freed from oppression and exploitation. Likewise, the labouring people cannot be freed from the yoke of oppression and exploitation as long as national independence and freedom have not been achieved. For the Vietnamese people, the bright road to independence, freedom and socialism was opened up by the triumph of the August Revolution and then by the historic victory of Dien Bien Phu.

However, US imperialism, the international gendarme, alarmed by the mounting might of socialism and the national liberation movement throughout the world, ousted the French colonialists and invaded the southern part of our country, turning it into a US neo-colony and military base. The scheme of US imperialism was to erase the gains of national independence and socialism of our people and, by so doing, to contain and eventually put down the national liberation movement, contain and push back socialism in this part of the world. As the US aggressors themselves have admitted, Vietnam became the testing ground for the power and prestige of US imperialism. Vietnam became the area of the fiercest, historic confrontation between the most warlike, the most stubborn, aggressive imperialism with the most powerful economic and military potential on one side, and the forces of national independence, democracy and socialism of which the Vietnamese people are the shock force in this region on the other.

The victory of Vietnam, therefore, is not only a victory of national independence and socialism in Vietnam, but has also a great international significance, and an epoch-making character. It has upset the global strategy of US imperialism. It has proved that the three revolutionary torrents of our times are on the offensive, repulsing imperialism step by step and overthrowing it part by part. Today, imperialism, even US imperialism, cannot grab a single square inch of any socialist country; neither can it push back the movement for national independence in the world, nor hinder the advance towards socialism of various countries. In this context, the victory of Vietnam has opened a new stage of development, extremely favourable for the world revolutionary movement. Together with the great victories of the fraternal Lao and Cambodian peoples, our victory has made a positive contribution to strengthening the forces of world socialism and created new favourable conditions for the safeguarding of peace and national independence in Indochina and South-east Asia.

The Revolutionary War

Our victory is the victory of a correct and creative revolutionary line and method, and of the correct and creative line of revolutionary war of our party. This revolutionary line and method consisted in holding high the two banners of national independence and socialism, mobilising the strength of our entire people, and combining our nation's might with that of our era, the strength existing in our country with that existing in the world, in order to create a great aggregate strength to fight and defeat US imperialism.

The line of our revolutionary war in the stage of our struggle against the US aggressors and for national salvation consisted in constantly applying the strategy of offensive, and also in knowing how to defeat the enemy step by step, forcing him to de-escalate from one rung to another and finally defeating him. It consisted in combining military actions with political struggles, attacks by the armed forces with mass uprisings, seizing control with wiping out the enemy, and wiping out the enemy with seizing control. It consisted in fighting the enemy on three fronts (political struggles, military actions and agitation work among enemy soldiers) and in all three strategic areas, namely the mountain areas, the rural areas, and the urban areas. . . . This line has encouraged and organised millions of people to rush to the front to destroy the enemy and save the country, thus forming an invincible battle-array for the revolutionary war in South Vietnam exactly as described in the book *Binh Thu Yeu Luoc* (Essentials of Military Art):[2] "One man fights a battle, thousands fight a battle, thousands like one man in battle."

This line is the creative application of the revolutionary military science of Marxism-Leninism to the realities of the revolutionary war in our country; it is the result of inheriting and developing the military art of our ancestors, learning from and improving upon the lessons of the August Revolution and the anti-French resistance, and summing up and enhancing the inexhaustible creative experiences of our people. In the light of this line the anti-US struggle for national salvation of the people throughout our

[2] *Essentials of Military Art*, by Tran Hung Dao.

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country has become the greatest epic of revolutionary war in Vietnam, radiant with so many glorious and outstanding exploits: the concerted uprisings in 1960 which developed into the revolutionary war to defeat the "special war" strategy; the general offensive and uprising at Tet of the year Mau Than (1968) to defeat the "limited war" strategy; the 1972 strategic offensive in the south and the great triumph over the strategic air blitz in 1972 which forced the US to quit and the general offensive and uprising in spring 1975 which toppled the puppet régime. Within 55 days and nights of lightning offensives and stormy uprisings we have smashed the one-million-odd army of the enemy, giving him no time to organise any significant resistance. This is the highest and most marvellous expression of the all-round revolutionary war strategy in South Vietnam.

A New Chapter

Fellow countrymen and combatants,
Comrades and friends,

With the victory of the anti-US war of resistance for national salvation an extremely brilliant chapter of our country's history has begun.

A new, tremendous and very inspiring task is awaiting our 45 million people. This task is to thoroughly act upon the Testament of our great Uncle Ho: "Our entire party and people closely joining their efforts will build a peaceful, reunified, independent, democratic, prosperous and strong Vietnam, and make a worthy contribution to the world revolution." Let us engage in construction and creative labour in order to bring about progress and prosperity to our Vietnam, happiness and well-being to our people.

Our people have made countless sacrifices and overcome untold hardships and difficulties to recover our country. This country belongs to our people. Let us prove ourselves worthy of our great Fatherland, of our heroic people, of so many martyrs who have laid down their lives, of the great sacrifices of our people. Let us strive to be worthy of Uncle Ho's "boundless love".

Let us prove ourselves worthy of being the real masters of the country. Let our compatriots in the north step up socialist construction. Let our compatriots in the south unite and strive to build there a fine national, democratic régime, a prosperous national and democratic economy, a progressive and healthy national and democratic culture. In the spirit of national reconciliation and concord, our people have shown leniency to all those who have strayed from the right path and who are now returning to the people, no matter what their past was. Provided they sincerely mend their abilities to the service of the homeland, their place among the people will be guaranteed and all the shame put on them by the criminal US imperialists will be washed away.

After so many years of war our people have today fully won the right to build their country in peace, in the south as well as in the north. Let our compatriots in the whole country start a stirring movement of labour. By our creative labour we will rapidly heal the wounds of war, restore and develop the economy, improve our living conditions. By our creative labour we will shake off all vestiges of the parasitic life and the sham prosperity generated in South Vietnam by our wicked enemy. By our creative labour we will transform the abundant resources of our land into inexhaustible sources of riches for our people, into modern agriculture, modern industry and advanced culture and science. Creative labour will not only embellish our homeland and bring to our people a happy and ever happier life, but will also transform the Vietnamese into new men and women, the masters of nature of society, the masters of their own lives.

For Peace and National Independence

As a people who have made tremendous sacrifices to win peace, national independence, democracy and social progress, the Vietnamese people are determined to stand shoulder to shoulder with the other peoples throughout the world to safeguard peace, to struggle tirelessly for national independence, democracy and social progress, and develop friendly relations with all countries on the basis of equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

We will do our best to strengthen solidarity and increase mutual support and assistance with the fraternal socialist countries and the international Communist and workers' movement in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, in order to win ever more splendid successes for the lofty ideal of Marxism-Leninism.

We pledge to strengthen the unshakeable militant friendship between the Vietnamese people and the people in our two fraternal neighbour countries—Laos and Cambodia—on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, for the sake of the security, growth and prosperity of each people, and for lasting and stable peace in this part of the world.

We will persist in our policy of strengthening solidarity and friendship with our neighbours in South-east Asia and the countries of the Third World in the struggle to regain and maintain national independence, consolidate sovereignty and oppose all schemes and manoeuvres of imperialism and old and new colonialism. . . .

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